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ABSTRACT

A British study compared the characteristics of Open University students 60 years and older with those of a random sample of younger students. Data collection involved obtaining demographic information from the student database, questionnaire responses from 831 out of 1,042 older students and 884 out of 1,418 students younger than 60, and follow-up personal interviews with some 60 students. The following were among the major findings: (1) among the Open University student population, three times as many older students compared with students under 60 have no formal educational qualifications; (2) two-thirds of the older students said that before enrolling they had worried about such things as memory, coping with the pace and organization of study, and exams and assessment; (3) most had experienced fewer difficulties than they had expected, although 3 in 10 had trouble with exams; (4) the older students have a slightly lower dropout rate than the under-60 students; (5) older students do slightly better on their continuous assessment work but slightly worse on the end-of-year exams; (6) there is virtually no difference between the overall pass rate for older students and that for the younger students; (7) students aged 60-64 are among the most successful of all Open University students in terms of pass rates, and they have the best academic performance of the over-60 students. (The document contains 32 tables and 6 figures; the appendix includes a copy of the survey instrument and interview schedule, as well as charts detailing research findings. (CML)

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CONTENTS

		Page no.
Map		3
List of figures		4
List of tables		5-6
Summary		7-9
Chapter 1	Introduction	10-14
Chapter 2	Methodology	15-18
Chapter 3	Who are the older students?	19-30
Chapter 4	Their motives and preparation	31-40
Chapter 5	Their experience of study	41-57
Chapter 6	Their academic performance	58-66
Chapter 7	Discussion	67-70
References		71
Appendix 1	Full occupation and educational background categories	72-74
Appendix 2	OU questionnaire sent to older students	76-80
Appendix 3	Response bias	81
Appendix 4	Interview schedule	82-84
Appendix 5	Full details of students' reasons for study -older and younger students	85
Appendix 6	Younger students' expectations of OU study	86
Appendix 7	Pleasurable expectations and educational background for over 60s	87
Appendix 8	Full details of student use of support service	88
Appendix 9	Tutorial and counselling support-contact with OU staff and other students	89

Fig.1.: Open University Regions involved in the study

List of Figures

		Page no.
1.	Map of Open University regions	3
2.	Age distribution of Open University students 1982	19
3.	Reasons for studying with the Open University	29
4.	Use of student support services -over 60s and under 60s	47
5.	Student contact with OU staff and other students	49
6.	Course choice of those born 1925 or earlier (aged 57 or older) 1982	60

List of tables

		Page No.
1.	Response rate of questionnaires	16
2.	Sex by age-Open University students 1982	20
3.	Marital status and sex for over 60s-Open University students and national population compared	21
4.	Highest educational qualification on entry-Open University students 1982	21
5.	Age of completion of full-time education-Open University students 1982	22
6.	Further education or training after leaving school	23
7.	Interruptions to schooling and further education	24
8.	Occupation on entry- Open University students 1982	26
9.	Occupation on entry-Open University or on retirement	27
10.	Motives for studying by sex and marital status	32
11.	Motives for studying by educational qualifications	33
12.	Reasons for choosing the Open University	34
13.	Student aims	35
14.	Formal preparation undertaken especially for Open University study	36
15.	Preparation for OU study by sex	37
16.	Preparation for OU study by educational level	37
17.	Preparation by selected occupations	38
18.	Study intentions	40
19.	Older students' expectations of OU study	41
20.	Pleasurable expectations of study and the extent to which they were achieved	43
21.	Changes in leisure activities	44
22.	Difficulties with OU study- older students	45
23.	Problems in using facilities -over and under 60s	50
24.	Problems for older students	52

25.	Percentage disabled by age group - all OU students 1981	54
26.	Annual incomes of Open University students 1982	56
27.	Workload of OU students 1982	58
28.	Drop-out in 1982	61
29.	Overall continuous assessment scores 1982	62
30.	Examination scores 1982	63
31.	Percentages passing in 1982	64
32.	Graduation rates by age when starting for students who entered the university in 1971-1973	65

OLDER STUDENTS IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

SUMMARY

1. Introduction

At present there are nearly 3,000 Open University students aged sixty or over (4.5% of the total Undergraduate population) and this probably amounts to nine in ten of all older students currently studying in higher education in the United Kingdom.

This paper reports on a two year research project carried out in four regions of the Open University to examine the characteristics and academic performance of older students to assess whether they form a distinctive student group having special educational needs.

2. Methodology

The project has involved:-

2.1 analysis of the demographic characteristics of older students taken from the student data base.

2.2 design of a questionnaire which was sent to all older students (1,042) in the London ,South, West Midlands and East Anglia regions and to a random sample of 1,418 students under the age of sixty and an analysis of their responses.

2.3 follow up personal interviews with some sixty students selected because their responses indicated a particularly interesting history or that they had had special difficulties.

3. Main findings

Who are the Older Students?

Older Open University students are not typical of their generation or the main Open University student body.

3.1 Among older people in the United Kingdom only about two in five have any kind of formal educational qualification. In contrast, four in five of the over 60s who are studying with the Open University have some kind of educational qualifications.

3.2 Looking at the Open University student population we find that three times as many older students have no formal educational qualifications compared with students under the age of sixty. However, a slightly higher proportion of the older students enter as graduates compared with the under 60s students.

3.3 On entering the Open University four in ten of the older students in the regions surveyed were retired, three in ten were still in professional occupations and two in ten were housewives.

3.4 Half of the men and a quarter of the women who responded to the questionnaire had their further education or training interrupted by the Second World War or by national service.

4. Their motives and preparation

4.1 The older students surveyed chose the Open University primarily because they liked the concept of the University or preferred home-based study.

4.2 Four main reasons for study were mentioned by more than half:

- to make up for missed opportunities
- to keep the mind active
- to continue developing as a person
- to get a degree

4.3 Just over half of the sample of older students had not undertaken any formal preparation before they entered the OU.

5. The experience of study

5.1 More than two-thirds of the respondents hoped their Open University studies would provide:

- the pleasure of learning
- stimulation and new ideas to think or talk about
- a sense of achievement

and those expectations appear largely to have been fulfilled.

5.2 Two-thirds were anxious about one or more aspect of their studies beforehand. The main areas of concern were:

- worries about memory
- coping with the pace and organisation of study
- exams and assessment

In practice most students actually experienced fewer difficulties than they had expected. However examinations caused problems for nearly three in ten.

5.3 Two-thirds of those responding said they attended face-to-face tutorials regularly and most were satisfied with the contact they had with Open University staff and other students.

5.4 One in ten experienced financial problems.

6. Academic performance

The academic performance of older students compares very favourably with that of the rest of the Open University student body.

6.1 Older students have a slightly lower drop-out rate than the under 60s students.

6.2 Older students do slightly better on their continuous assessment work, but slightly worse in the end of year examinations.

6.3 There is virtually no difference between the overall pass rate for older students (continuous assessment and examination scores combined) and that for the under 60s.

6.4 Of the over 60s students the 60-64 age group have the best academic performance.
In terms of pass rates students aged 60-64 are among the most successful of all Open University students.

7. Discussion

7.1 The main issues raised by the investigations are reviewed and the findings of an international survey of universities of the Third Age are noted.

7.2 The final part of the paper takes up the question of whether special provision should be made for older students in the O.U.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this report we present the findings of a research project carried out by the Open University's Older Students Research Group between 1982 and 1984 on the characteristics and progress of older students in the Open University. Some preliminary findings of the research have been previously reported in a Survey Research Department paper[1] and in Teaching at a Distance[2].

For the purpose of our study we defined 'older students' as those aged 60 or over: in 1982 the Open University had 2,826 registered students in that age group, constituting about 4.4 per cent of the total undergraduate population. We believe that they represent 90 per cent of all the older students currently studying in higher education in the United Kingdom[3].

Future trends in educational provision and population

The number of people aged 65 or over has grown by over two million since 1961, but they are not expected to increase much more up to the end of the century[4]. At present only a relatively small proportion of the ten million or so over 60s undertake formal educational activities; about 200,000 (2%) have been supposed to be involved in adult education and 3,000 (0.03%) in higher education[5]. But we expect these numbers to rise, and we hope that our present study will provide information useful to, amongst others, those planning the educational provision for the increased numbers.

The increase in the numbers of older people is obviously not a feature of population trends in the U.K. alone. Throughout the world, a total of 350 million of older people in 1975 is expected to rise to 1,120 million by the year 2025[6]. In consequence, the establishment of the rights of older people to adequate incomes, health-care, housing, employment, training and education has becomea major matter of international concern. One response has been the formation, in Toulouse in 1973, of the first University of the Third Age. An International Association of the Universities of the Third Age was formed in 1975, and by the end of the decade Universities of the Third Age were developing in ten countries in Western Europe, and others in the United States and Canada. In the United Kingdom the movement was

initiated by the foundation of the first British U3A in Cambridge in 1982, and since then many others have developed around the country. Peter Laslett, one of the founders of the Cambridge U3A, had argued in 1980 that "the British over 60s are the worst instructed people not only in our own population but also among the advanced Western countries as a whole". He called for a Charter of five educational rights: "a fair share of the educational budget of the nation; the right to the abandonment of the identification of education with youth; the right of access to all educational institutions on their own terms; the right to a 'distance teaching' organisation to bring education for the elderly into the home; and the right to recognition of their unique educational and cultural value". Laslett thus recognized the role that distance learning could play, but it is interesting to note in the present context that he gave a "resounding no" to the idea that the Open University should undertake the task[7]. The Open University had itself recognized the growing interest in the area by publishing in 1978 a course at undergraduate level called An Ageing Population, and following that, short courses on Caring for Older People and Planning Retirement. The new (1985) course Health and Disease will include a section on ageing [8].

In the summer of 1982, the 124 national delegates at the World Assembly on Ageing agreed on an International Plan of Action, for which approval was to be sought at the United Nations General Assembly. Two of its recommendations were that continuous adult education should undertake "preparation for retirement and the creative use of time" and that "educational policies should reflect the principle of the right to education of the ageing" [9]. It became increasingly obvious, in the University of the Third Age and elsewhere, that more research was needed, into the process of ageing itself, into the social consequences of the existence of larger numbers of older people in the population, and into the capacity of older people for learning. A re-examination of preconceived ideas about learning in later life began. In Britain a number of issues were raised in the brief approach to this question by Midwinter[10]. Allman has challenged the attitudes of many psychologists to questions of aptitude and ageing;[11] and more specific studies have been undertaken, for instance by Woodley[12] and James[13].

The Older Students Research Group

It was in the context of the discussion of such issues that we began to consider the performance of older students within the Open University. The presence within the University of a large group of older students, and of a substantial body of information about them in the University's records suggested that an opportunity existed for a detailed study. In late 1981 an informal research group came together to examine the needs, attitudes and experiences of older students within this distance learning system. The group includes full and part-time staff from four of the University's thirteen regions, together with members of the Survey Research Department and the research group of Regional Academic Services at the central Walton Hall campus.

The research group began by examining demographic characteristics of all older students, such as workloads, pass rates and educational background, taken from the student data base[14]. It then designed a questionnaire to seek information on the background and experiences of a selection of older students both before and after commencing Open University study [15]. In October 1982 this questionnaire was sent to all the older students registered in 1982 in the four regions contributing to the project, London (R01), South (R02), West Midlands (R04) and East Anglia (R06). There were 1,042 older students in these four regions, 37 per cent of all the University's older students. Practical reasons dictated the choice of regions, though this meant omitting samples from the north of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Nevertheless the four regions, ranging as they do from metropolitan London to rural Norfolk and the industrial West Midlands, include examples of most of the differences in geographical and economic circumstances which affect Open University students and, as we shall see, our sample of students accurately reflected the features we found in the whole population of the O.U.

A slightly modified questionnaire was sent at the same time to 1,418 students under 60 in the four regions. The group were thus able to compare the issues and aspects of study which particularly concerned older students with those which concerned students as a whole. Of the older students who responded, some sixty were selected in the four regions and interviewed at length to provide richer and more personal, though not necessarily representative material to supplement that derived from the database and the questionnaires.

We have tried to answer a wide range of questions about older students and the Open University. What kinds of older people choose to become Open University students? What are their motives for deciding to take up degree level study at the age of 60 or 70? How do they prepare themselves to become students again? What do they get out of studying with the Open University: do they achieve their original objectives? What kinds of academic results do they obtain, and how do these compare with those of younger students? Does the Open University need to make special provision in its teaching system for older students? The answers we got confirmed some of our expectations, but also provided many new insights. We discuss the evidence we assembled and the answers which emerged in the chapters which follow.

References to Chapter 1

1. Morrison V. — Older students in the Open University- preliminary findings. SRD paper 244

2. Cutress N., Morrison V., Palmer F. — The Older Open University Student. Teaching at a Distance 24

3. Based on Midwinter E. — Age is opportunity. Centre for policy on ageing. 1982

4. HMSO — Census 1981, Social Trends 1984 p19

5. Midwinter op.cit.

6. UNO — Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging

7. Laslett P. — Educating our elders, New Society 13th March 1980

8. OU Courses — An Ageing Population and Caring for Older People, Planning Retirement. See also - An Ageing Population: A Reader and Sourcebook ed. V. Carver & P. Liddiard. Open University Press 1978.

9. Vienna paper op. cit.

10. Midwinter op.cit

11. Allman P. — Aptitude and Ageing. Higher Education Review Autumn 1983

12. Woodley A. — The older the better? OU internal paper

13. James A. — Age-group differences in the psychological well-being and academic performance of distance learners. OU internal paper

14. Morrison V. — Older Students in the Open University. SRD paper 219

15. See appendix 2

Chapter 2: Methodology

The Older Students project was designed in three stages-

(i) demographic analysis of the older student population in the Open University as a whole, and in the four selected regions

(ii) a questionnaire on the background and experience of those older students registered in the four regions

(iii) personal interviews with selected questionnaire respondents in the four regions.

The previous work by Morrison on Older Students[1] provided a basis for the first stage, and this in turn contributed to the questionnaire design. Morrison's work also provided the data on the academic performance of older students used in chapter 7. Pilot studies by Butterworth and Palmer in London[2] and by Bilston in Cambridge[3] also helped to structure the questionnaire and later the interviews.

The Open University's administrative system both collects and generates data on each student for the duration of study. Initially, demographic information is collected by means of the student's application form and personal details forms; on these, students are invited to code themselves (on the basis of lists provided) for a number of variables such as occupation, level of highest educational achievement, sex and marital status, as well as giving uncoded information such as date of birth. In most cases in this report we have used the categories as indicated by the students, but in others we have grouped categories together to make the interpretation of data easier. We have, for example, in several instances used 'high', 'medium' and 'low' qualification groups, which are amalgamations of categories given by students as their level of highest educational qualification (see appendix 1)

These details form the basic student record, which is then supplemented by University-generated data such as assessment scores, course choice and summer-school attendance for as many years as the student continues studying. These data then form the basis for the demographic analysis of our older students. After pilot analysis on several different populations, we defined the basic group for our analysis as those who were over 60 in 1982 and registered (had paid full fees) for study. Throughout this project we have used the terms 'older' and 'younger' when referring to over 60s and under 60s respectively . Wherever possible, we have used OU census data when describing

the demographic characteristics of the older students as being the most reliable data available. In this report we have concentrated on the following major demographics: occupation, highest educational level, age of completion of full-time education and sex.

We decided, on the basis of the number of older students indicated by the regional demographic analyses, to send questionnaires to all the over 60s in the four regions. We also decided to obtain responses from a representative sample of under 60s to illustrate not only the common characteristics of OU students but also to identify particular differences due to age.

Questionnaires were then sent to all 1,042 older students, and to a sample of 1,418 under 60s, the number in the latter example being calculated to allow for the lower response rate anticipated on the basis of similar surveys. In the event, we received 861 (83%) completed questionnaires from the over 60s, and 884 (62%) from the under 60s. The response rates were, in fact, even higher, but some questionnaires were returned too late to be included in the analysis. Because of the high response rates, response bias is not seen to be a problem in the following analysis. Detailed notes of the small biasses that were present can be found in Appendix 3. The numbers and percentages of questionnaires sent out and received back in each region are as follows:

Table 1: Response rate of questionnaires

Over 60s	Sent out	Sent back	% response
London	370	298	80.5
South	237	195	82.3
West Midlands	187	159	85.0
East Anglia	248	209	84.3
All	1042	861	82.6
Under 60s			
London	500	304	60.8
South	324	199	61.4
West Midland	258	161	62.4
East Anglia	336	220	65.5
All	1418	884	62.3

Although limited to a postal, self-completion type of questionnaire (because of the sample sizes involved) we set out to establish a fairly solid foundation of quantitative information in two main areas of interest (a) how and why the students came to be studying with the University - their reasons and motivations; (b) their personal experiences before and after joining the University. The questions were largely pre-coded, but opportunity was also given for the student to make comments in areas such as problems experienced and patterns of employment, as well as on other points they felt were important. The questionnaires to the over 60s and to the under 60s were identical apart from questions in which some options referred to retirement: in these, more relevant career-related options were substituted for the under 60s. The older students questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 2. We hoped that the responses to these questionnaires would help us to 'shape' the personal interviews which were to be carried out later.

The questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Then, in a second stage of the analyses, the basic demographic data for the respondents held on the university's main computer was added to the questionnaire data to allow analysis of the questionnaire responses for the various sub groups of the student population. Details of the characteristics of respondents compared with all those to whom the questionnaire was sent are given in Appendix 3.

The Interviews

On the basis of questionnaire responses, we identified small groups (10-20) of older students in each region for possible further investigation by personal interview. These students were specially chosen because we saw that they had made comments which were particularly interesting or threw light on older students' study problems. For this reason, they cannot be regarded as representative of the older student group. An interview agenda was constructed to expand on answers already given, and to add information in particular areas which could not easily be handled by the questionnaire, such as disability, summer school experience and specific personal difficulties. This interview agenda is given in full in Appendix 4. The selected students were contacted by letter to explain the purpose of the exercise and to solicit their co-operation. The interviews were then carried out by members of the project group, some by telephone and some face to face .

In addition to responses to the questions asked, note was also taken of the tone of the interview, the character and situation of the student, and where

prompts (if any) had been necessary. These interviews provided a useful fund of quotations and case study material for the project and complemented the quantitative data from the questionnaires.

References

1. Morrison V. — Older students in the Open University.SRD 244

2. Butterworth W. Palmer F. — Report on a pilot study on older students in the London Region. OU internal paper

3. Bilston B. — Report on a pilot study on older students in the Cambridge region .OU internal paper.

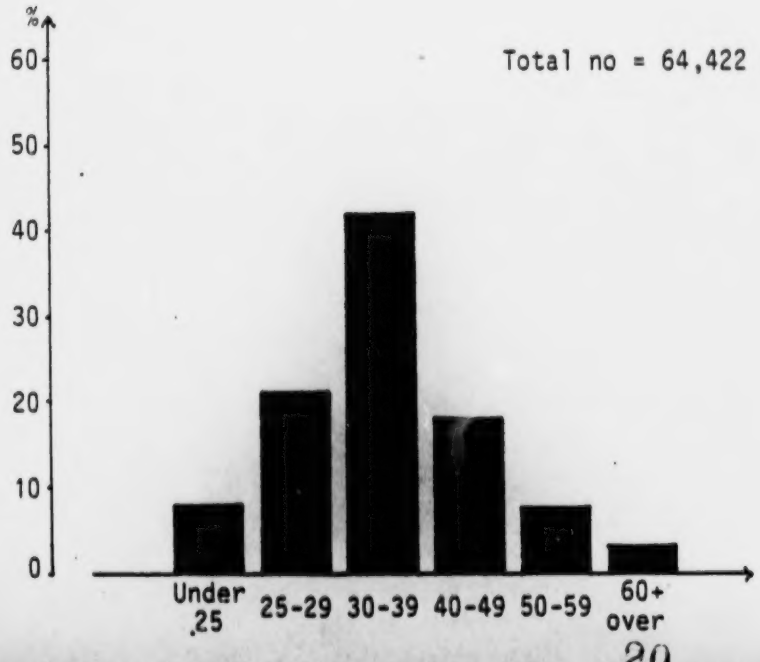
Chapter 3: Who are the older students?

In this chapter we give detailed answers to some questions about the characteristics of students over 60 in the Open University. We have used 1981 Census figures to make some comparisons with their age group in the national population; and we have used such estimates as are available on the participation of older students in education in the United Kingdom.[1]

From the data held on all Open University students we extracted the data for all over 60 registered students in 1982 on number in each age group, proportion of men and women, marital status, educational and occupational background. We then looked at the data for the over 60s in the four regions chosen for our study sample; as there is little difference between this group (who make up 40% of all the over 60 students) and the total over 60s population, we give below the data for all the over 60 students. We have, however, been able to add more details on educational and occupational background taken from the responses to the questionnaire of our study sample; and finally we quote some comments made by individuals in interviews.

Figure 2

Age distribution of Open University students 1982



National comparisons

In 1981 of the 55.9 million people in the United Kingdom, 10.8 million or 19 per cent were over 60. The 2,826 OU students who were over 60 in 1982 (4.4% of the total OU undergraduate body) make up a very small self-selected group in the population. The distribution of their ages does not follow that of the national population, as figure 2 shows.

Nor do the proportions of men and women in our OU student group correspond to what we find in the population as a whole. Nationally there are considerable differences in the proportions of men and women in the older age groups; there are only slightly more women than men in the 60-64 age group, but nearly twice as many women over 75 and nearly three times as many ever 80. As the following table shows, even in the 60-64 age group, women still make up less than half the number of students and their proportion decreases in the older age groups. Given the proportion of men in the national population the disproportionate number of men among the older students is even more striking than it appears here.

Table 2: Sex by age- Open University students 1982

	60-64	65-69	over 70	All over 60	Under 60	All students
Base = finally registered students	1,576	833	417	2,826	61,596	64,422
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Female	49	44	40	46	45	45
Male	51	56	59	54	55	55

We find similar proportions of men and women in Woodley's study of mature university students,[2] in which 58% of students over 51 were men. But apart from higher education the Open University student body differs not only from the national population but also from the student bodies in adult education as a whole; in classes run by university extra-mural departments, the Workers' Educational Association and the local education authorities, the numbers of women considerably exceed those of men.

In terms of marital status, however, the older student in the Open University conforms more closely to the national picture. Most of the older male students are married (83%) but as in the population as a whole, the proportion of married women is smaller (49%) and hence more women are single, divorced or widowed.

Table 3: Marital status and sex for over 60s-Open University students and national population compared

	Female		Male	
	OU students	UK population	OU students	UK population
Base = 100%	1,296	6,303,704	1,524	4,465,479
	%	%	%	%
Single	21	11	8	8
Married	49	44	83	76
Widowed	22	42	5	14
Divorced	6	2	2	2
Other	2	-	1	-
No information	1	-	1	-

Educational background

As to educational qualifications, in the national population older people have fewer qualifications than younger age groups. For instance fewer than 5 per cent have university degrees or an equivalent qualification [3], whereas the total rises to 16 per cent amongst older students in the Open University. Table 4 below shows the highest qualification held by students on entry to the University.

Table 4: Highest educational qualification on entry - Open University students 1982

	Over 60s			
	Female	Male	All	All students
Base = finally registered students	1,296	1,524	2,826	64,422
	%	%	%	%
No formal qualifications	18	19	18	7
RSA,CSE (except grade 1)	6	4	5	3
CSE (grade 1),GCE 'O' levels	25	26	25	21
GCE 'A' levels	15	14	14	18
ONC/OND	1	3	2	6
HNC/HND	1	7	4	10
Teaching certificate	21	7	14	22
University diploma	8	8	8	7
University degree	4	10	7	5
Postgraduate degree	0	1	1	0

It is clear that more older students have lower qualifications, but also more have degrees and diplomas. There is also an interesting difference between older men and women, in that the men are more likely to have a degree and the women more likely to have a teaching certificate. Obviously, qualifications gained are linked to the age at which school education ceased. The table below shows the age at which our students left school.

Table 5: Age of completion of full-time education - Open University students 1982

	Over 60s			
	Female	Male	All	All students
Base = finally registered students	1,296	1,524	2,826	64,422
	%	%	%	%
15 or earlier	22	29	26	14
16	24	24	24	21
17	18	16	16	13
18	12	9	10	14
19	4	2	3	5
20	6	3	4	5
21 or later	14	16	15	28
No information	1	1	1	0

Most Open University students over 60 were born between 1918 and 1923 (1,576 of the 2,826, or 55%) and so were in their late teens or early twenties during the second World War, and therefore in consequence were especially liable to having their studies interrupted. Half of them completed their full-time education at 16 or earlier; for them the minimum school leaving age was then 14, entry to secondary education was limited and to university very difficult. Men seem more likely than women to have left at the earliest opportunity, although women left at higher rates between 17 and 20. Most of these over 60s, then, would have completed their full time education before the outbreak of war in 1939. On the other hand 15 per cent of the over 60s had continued their full-time education to 21.

So we found that a significant number of the people who took up study with the Open University in the 1970s and 1980s were people who had already succeeded in taking advantage of the more limited opportunities available in the 1920s and 1930s.

Although many of these older students left school at the earliest possible time, most of them had happy memories of that time. When they were asked whether they had enjoyed their schooling, 36 per cent said 'very much', 44 per cent said 'on the whole', 15 per cent said 'not very much' and only 4 per cent said 'not at all'. Their attitudes to training or further education after leaving school also reveal their positive attitudes. The questionnaire specified courses leading to professional qualifications, courses mainly for interest, apprenticeships and work-related courses. Students were asked to say whether these courses had been taken within 5 years of leaving school, or after five years. Only 18 of the 861 respondents made no mention of any training or further education at all: 79 per cent had had further education or training within five years and 73 per cent later than five years after leaving school (Table 6). The picture is a complex one, as many students had had several different kinds of education or training at several stages in their lives.

Table 6: Further education or training after leaving school

Base = respondents	861
	%
None at all	2
Within 5 years of leaving school	79
At least 5 years after leaving school	73

We asked the older students whether their schooling or later education had been interrupted, and if so, by what; but we did not ask them when that interruption had occurred. The table which follows shows the various causes of interruption to study, particularly with regard to the differences between men and women.

Table 7: Interruptions to schooling and further education

	Female	Male*	All over 60s
Base = respondents	393	437	861
	%	%	%
War/national service	24	51	38
Lack of money	28	24	26
Marriage	14	8	11
Moving home	12	7	10
Having a family	12	8	10
Illness (self)	11	7	9
Illness (family)	12	3	7
Other	4	3	3

When we look at the interruptions to continued education in relation to sex, we find that half the men and one quarter of the women had their education interrupted by war or national service. Lack of money had been a problem for both men and women (about a quarter). Not surprisingly, marriage and having a family caused more of a disruption for women, and the traditional role of women as tenders of the sick is also shown.

This group of students, then, passing through the early stages of their lives in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, had suffered various interruptions to their studies. But the striking fact about them is that the great majority of them nevertheless managed at that time to continue pursuing educational opportunities - one of which at a later stage in their lives was to be the Open University. When we focussed on them in our research project we were discovering a self-selected group of educational enthusiasts. We talked to some of them in our interviews:

> "My mother hadn't much time for higher education.. I always wanted to know more".
>
> "My father promised me that I could go to University if I were equal to it". (but the father died and she could not)
>
> "There were my brothers to be educated.... I wanted to make sure that my self-education had been on the right lines".

* In this, and some other tables, the numbers in the demographic groups will not add up to the total number of respondents. This is because we were not able to identify all respondents in terms of their background characteristics.

"I never had any revulsion from learning".

"The Open University is now a natural and expected part of my life".

"Educationally I felt a second-class citizen in my own home".

"After a lifetime of technology it was time I became civilised. (I chose the OU because) it would combat any tendency to atrophy and because discipline is healthy."

"I'd missed out on study. When I was at grammar school I left because of my eyesight.... in those days they hadn't learnt to be as helpful as they are now... if I'd had normal eyesight I'd have likely gone on to a university then, because I would have liked to have done so."

"I do not want to depart this life with a lot of half-baked and over-baked thoughts in my mind. I must get this sorted out- this extraordinary business of being alive.... I do the work for my own pleasure and delight, and it is wholly pleasurable and delightful.... When perhaps I should be losing interest in things I am doing exactly the opposite. I am making sense of what I have learned along the way."

Occupational background

The analysis of the occupational backgrounds of students over 60, and the relationship of those histories to educational opportunities, is a complex and difficult process. Older people may have had several occupations in their working lives and may have made use of different educational opportunities while moving between each of these occupations. Some students of course had followed the same occupation throughout their working lives, while others made radical occupation changes; some remained in the same general field but moved "upwards" within it into management or administration. Women may have had a career interrupted by marriage and then later resumed the same career or embarked on quite a new one. The careers of older students also often reflect the history of the forty years or more through which they had worked: in the case of the particular group we were studying the inter-war depression, the Second World War and the post-war reconstruction. But it should not be assumed that the war had always had an adverse or disruptive effect on careers; in some cases the war had stimulated ambition or opened up new opportunities. One particular feature of the immediate post-war period, for instance, was the opportunity which was offered to mature people to retrain as teachers.

The table below shows the occupations reported by the older students at the time of their entry to the Open University.

Table 8: Occupation on entry - Open University students 1982

	Over 60s			
	Female	Male	All	All students
Base = finally registered students	1,296	1,524	2,826	64,422
	%	%	%	%
Housewives	34	0	16	17
Armed forces	0	1	0	3
Administrators & managers	2	11	7	4
Teachers	13	8	10	21
Professions & arts	10	11	11	11
Qualified scientists & engineers	0	6	3	4
Technical personnel	0	6	3	13
Skilled trades	0	2	1	3
Unskilled manual	0	3	2	2
Communication & transport	0	1	1	2
Clerical & office	13	7	9	11
Shops & services	2	4	3	4
Retired, unemployed	24	39	32	4
In institutions	0	0	0	0
No information	1	1	1	1

When they register, students are asked to state what their occupation is at that time. We do not know what other occupation they may have had . One third of the over 60 students had already retired when they entered the university from 1971 onwards. We did not know what their previous occupations had been from university records and we therefore included questions about previous occupation and retirement in the questionnaire. The responses show the process of retirement continuing; by the time they completed the questionnaire 72 per cent of these older students said they were retired, another 4 per cent expected to retire within a year, 9 per cent in two or three years and 9 per cent at some later date. But retirement is not a straightforward concept and the students' interpretations differed . Some interpreted it as retirement from full-time work, but

others counted their new part-time work as an occupation; and full-time housewives questioned the notion of retirement altogether. We asked for a job title or description of their main occupations during their working life and from the responses established what had been their occupation on retirement.

Table 9: Occupation on entry to the Open University or on retirement

	Number	%
Base = respondents	861	100
Housewives	63	7
Armed forces	7	1
Admin and managers	134	16
Teachers	140	16
Profession and arts	159	19
Scientists and engineers	47	6
Technical personnel	32	4
Skilled trades	10	1
Other manual work	18	2
Communication and transport	21	2
Clerical and office	117	14
Sales and services	46	5
No response to question on occupation	67	8
Summary		
Several occupations quoted	275	32
Major changes of occupation	38	4
Change to teaching	33	4
Upward mobility	66	8
Housewives with careers	88	10

Almost a third of the respondents mentioned several occupations and this enabled us to identify some aspects of their career changes. One of the major changes we observed was the pursuit of a new career after retirement from the armed forces; another significant group of students were those who had left their previous occupation to take up teaching. We counted as examples of "upward mobility" such changes as those from clerical or technical work to administration or scientific and technical research, but not the normal process of promotion within occupations.

Of those older students who gave their occupation as 'housewife' more than two thirds had combined this with other occupations several times during their lives.

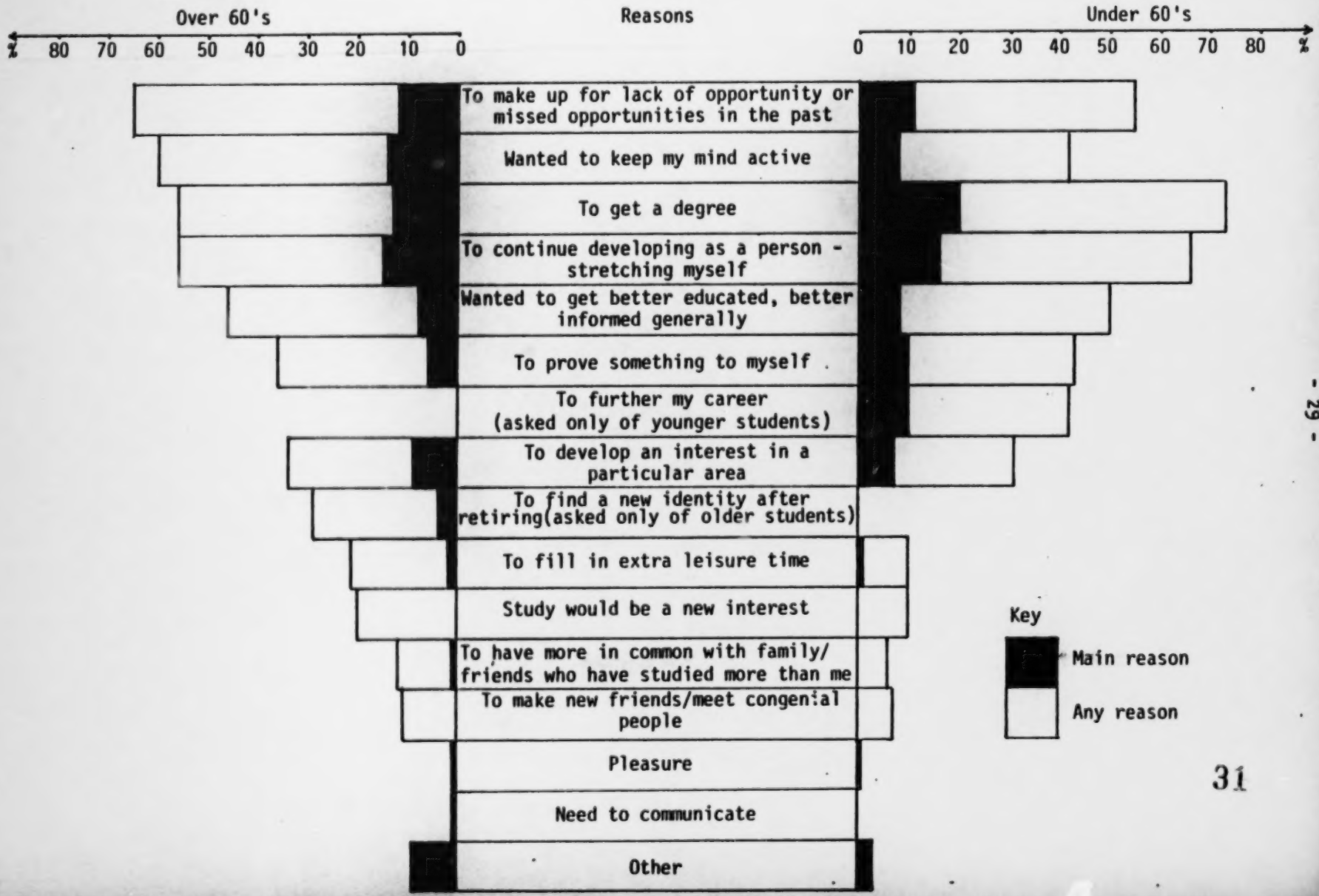
That more than half of the older students who responded had been in fairly senior positions in administration, management or the professions and relatively few in technical or manual occupations did not surprise us: these students were people who had already made use of the educational and training opportunities open to them and had ended, or were close to ending, their careers in relatively high status occupations. But there was still in our sample a very wide range of people, from the eminent to those who had spent a lifetime in humble occupations.

Once again the interviews gave us an opportunity to hear them talking about their careers.

> "I did not appreciate the importance of study until I joined the RAF at the age of 19, after wasting four years at a grammar school".
>
> "I had led a busy life as a bookseller, always dipping into things and never reading anything properly. (My son said) People like you who are active are a liability to their families when they retire. You must find something to keep you occupied.... If you were done out of your education in your youth because of the wars, you should do an OU degree or some courses".
>
> "I joined up in '39 instead of going to the University to read Engineering".
>
> "There was no question of that in '35. I only had an elementary education, then it was the depression and I went to work in an underground laundry- under a hotel - for 3d an hour".
>
> "I was in the civil service after being in the Air Force. I just wanted to change my life. With my second wife we did this job together (keeping a village shop)".
>
> "Having spent a lot of my life in the Service and Civil Service I have always been used to doing a certain amount of writing and composition and writing reports 'and so on' ".

Figure 3

Motives for study


Over 60's
% 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0
Reasons
Under 60's
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 %
To make up for lack of opportunity or missed opportunities in the past
Wanted to keep my mind active
To get a degree
To continue developing as a person - stretching myself
Wanted to get better educated, better informed generally
To prove something to myself
To further my career (asked only of younger students)
To develop an interest in a particular area
To find a new identity after retiring(asked only of older students)
To fill in extra leisure time
Study would be a new interest
To have more in common with family/ friends who have studied more than me
To make new friends/meet congenial people
Pleasure
Need to communicate
Other
Key
Main reason
Any reason

> "I was in the army and after demob I thought it was better to take a job than to improve my educational achievements. I wish now I hadn't. On the other hand I have been able to work my way up in local government, but I feel insecure when I'm dealing with younger men with better qualifications. Even taking the OU courses, before I get a degree, gives me a chance to get on terms with younger colleagues".

In looking at older students in the Open University we are, then, looking at both a small and exceptional group in the national population. Adult students (people over 19) constitute about 6 per cent of the national population; the total Open University undergraduate student population of some 65,000 constitutes less than 2 per cent of the estimated number of adult students. As we have seen, the 2,826 older students form only 4.4 per cent of the whole Open University undergraduate population. But this, though small, we believe to be a very significant and interesting percentage: they are perhaps the pioneers of much larger numbers of older people who may well be entering adult and higher education in the next twenty years.

References

1. Midwinter E. Op. cit.

2. Woodley A. Op. cit.

3. Social Trends 1981 P.65

Chapter 4: Their motives and preparation

This chapter draws on the questionnaire responses and the comments given by students in interview. We asked students what had been their reasons for taking up Open University study and what preparation they had made. They were given the opportunity both to give a number of reasons and to pick their main reason (figure 3).

Having looked at the backgrounds of our older students (chapter 3) we were not surprised that the commonest reason the older students gave was "to make up for lack of opportunities or missed opportunities in the past"(65%) But though many of them gave this as one reason, they preferred two rather different answers as their main reasons: "to keep my mind active" (60%) and "to continue developing as a person" (56%). Like the younger students, many older students also gave the simple answer "to get a degree". The older students were less conscious than we might have expected of the supposed effects of retirement: questions about "a new interest", and "new friends" all received relatively low ratings.

The interviews gave us examples of the many different motives of these older students. There were the lost opportunities: Comments such as - "I wanted to widen my horizons and make up for a missed education", and "frustrated ambition about earlier education". There were once again the obstacles earlier in life: "the family could not afford it"... "better to get a job" ... "work to support the family".... "seriously wounded"(in the war). There were the demands of a working life: "too busy to undertake much formal study" ... "impossible whilst I was still working".

Very few students were studying in the OU in order to have more in common with friends or family, although those that were provided articulate comments:

> " I wanted to keep pace with my children and sons and daughters-in-law".

> I would like to get a degree for the sake of the family and grandchildren. My grandchildren call me 'Super Gran' and so I would like to prove that if Grans can do it, then they can".

When we looked at the responses of the younger students we found not unexpectedly, that "to get a degree" was both the commonest (73%) and the main (20%) motive given. But their other most frequent reason was one also shared with

many older students "to continue developing as a person - stretching myself" (65%). In general the similarities between the motives of the older students and the younger students were more significant than their differences: these people formed a common group of Open University students rather than two groups differentiated by age.

Sex and marital status and motivation

The responses of men and women, married and single students all focussed around the familiar frequently-quoted motives already discussed, but there were some differences worth noting: Table 10 illustrates them.

Table 10: Motives for studying by sex and marital status

	Married men	Married women	Single men	Single women	Other * groups
Base = respondents	363	185	36	93	158
	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of opportunity	61	70	58	74	67
To keep mind active	64	56	42	56	60
To get a degree	58	57	61	62	49
To develop as a person	49	67	50	61	56
To get better educated	39	57	58	44	48
To prove something to myself	29	39	31	44	46
To develop a particular area	36	36	39	32	27
To find a new identity	34	21	25	37	21
To fill in extra leisure time	27	14	19	17	22
Study would be new interest	18	20	6	20	20
More in common with family etc.	8	19	8	11	14
To make new friends	8	14	14	13	12
Other	7	12	6	16	18

* widowed, divorced etc .

Married men tended to emphasise "keeping the mind active" (64%) whereas married women in common with single women stressed "making up for lost opportunities" (70%, 74%) and the need to "continue developing as a person" (67%, 61%). Single students, both men and women were anxious to get a degree (61%, 62%).

More women than men felt the need to prove something to themselves (around 40% compared with 30%) and "to develop as a person" (over 60% compared with 50%). Although lowly ranked overall, the motive related to having more in common with family and friends, attracted a much more positive response from married women than anyone else (19% compared with around 10%).

Motivation and previous qualifications

When we compared the motives of older students with low educational qualifications with those of older students with high qualifications there were some fairly predictable differences (Table 11). Students with low qualifications particularly wanted to "make up for lost opportunities" and "to get a degree", while people with higher qualifications emphasised continuing "to develop as a person" and "keeping the mind active". But as with the younger/older comparison, the similarities in attitudes amongst all Open University students seem to be more significant than the differences between them. (Appendix 1 defines the educational groups.)

Table 11: Motives for studying by educational qualifications

	Low qualification	Medium qualification	High qualification
Base = respondents	425	152	241
	%	%	%
Lack of opportunity	74	63	52
To keep mind active	60	62	59
To get a degree	61	55	51
To develop as a person	55	49	62
To get better educated	53	41	36
To prove something to myself	41	26	33
To develop a particular area	28	36	42
To find a new identity	29	29	29
To fill in extra leisure time	18	28	25
Study would be new interest	23	16	13
More in common with family etc	16	11	7
To make new friends	11	11	10
Other	12	8	13

Why the OU?

When we asked the two groups why they chose to study with the Open University rather than with some other institution , we had the responses as illustrated in the table below.

Table 12: Reasons for choosing the Open University

	Over 60s	Under 60s
Base = respondents	861	884
	%	%
Liked the concept of the OU	70	59
Prefer home-based studies	58	57
Did not consider any other institution	49	30
OU had the range of subjects required	33	32
Use of TV/radio as teaching media	23	12
No attractive alternatives available locally	21	31
OU had a better reputation/recommended	11	12
Could not get on the course I wanted elsewhere	3	5
Other	12	21

As OU staff we were of course very encouraged by the positive nature of the responses. Large percentages of both older and younger students had liked the concept of the OU and many had thought that the University had a better reputation than the possible alternatives; the availability of a home-based learning system was also an important factor. For the older students the OU had been particularly attractive. Half of them had not considered any other institution, and twice as many older students as younger students were attracted by the use of television and radio as teaching media. The younger students had had a rather less positive approach. More than two-thirds of them had considered other institutions and for nearly a third the absence of attractive alternatives had been an important factor in their choice.

Their aims

We also asked both groups whether their specific aim in taking up OU studies had been pleasure, or the acquisition of a B.A. (six credit) or B.A. Hons (eight credit) degree, or some combination of these (Table 13).

Table 13: Students aims

	Over 60s	Under 60s
Base = respondents	861	884
	%	%
6 credit BA degree	31	38
Studying for pleasure	20	10
6 credit + pleasure	19	8
Honours degree	19	34
Honours + pleasure	11	10

This question elicited much clearer differences between the older and the younger students than our questions about motives. The younger students had very clear instrumental aims in becoming OU students, 72 per cent aiming at either a B.A. or a B.A. Hons. The older students' aims were more mixed. Rather fewer of them were intending to go on to an honours degree; only 20 per cent of them were studying purely for pleasure, although for 50 per cent in total pleasure was one of the aims of their study. If this particular group of older students provides helpful evidence about older students in general, it may be that it is that pure 'enrichment' courses are not enough- some element of striving and achievement is important for them, as it very clearly is for younger students.

Preparation for study

We wanted to find out whether our older students had had any preparation for their studies and, if so, of what kind. They could have taken one of the courses run by the National Extension College, or could have attended preparatory courses run by local authorities or other bodies, or could have prepared mainly by doing private reading. The responses to the questionnaire gave us information about this, both for the older and younger students. We were then able to compare the two groups from the point of view of the amount and kind of preparation which they had done. We also looked for any differences between men and women and between different occupational groups. We compared their responses too with what they had said about their previous experience of formal education.

Just over half of the older students (52%) and rather more of the younger students (59%) had done no formal preparatory work. Those older students who did so used Open University preparatory materials or took preparatory courses run by the NEC or other bodies in fairly equal proportions. As the table below shows there are no great differences between older and younger students in this respect; though the percentages for younger students are smaller, except in the case of those using Open University materials.

Table 14: Formal preparation undertaken especially for Open University study

	Over 60s	Under 60s
Base = respondents	861	884
	%	%
Nothing formal	52	59
NEC preparatory course	15	9
OU preparatory materials	15	15
Other preparatory course	14	11
'O' or 'A' levels	6	7
Other	5	3
No answer	4	2

When we compared the responses of men and women we found that more women than men had done formal preparation (Table 15), 53% of the older women and 44% of the older men had done some formal preparation; and 47% of the younger women and 34% of the younger men had done so.

Table 15: Preparation for OU study by sex

	Over 60s		Under 60s	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Base = respondents	393	437	442	415
	%	%	%	%
No formal preparation	47	56	53	66
Some formal preparation	53	44	47	34

We did find interesting differences when we looked at the educational level reached by the students in our sample, as the table below shows. The codes for the individual levels were grouped for simplicity. Low qualifications covers those who do not have A level or equivalent qualifications, medium is used of those with A level, ONC/OND, HNC/HND etc. and high includes any higher qualifications than these.

Table 16: Preparation for OU study by educational level

	Over 60s			Under 60s		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Base = respondents	425	152	241	267	294	293
	%	%	%	%	%	%
No formal preparation	45	52	64	48	60	68
Some formal preparation	55	48	36	52	40	32

More of those whose educational level was low (55%) did formal preparation than those whose level was medium (48%) or high (36%) . We see a similar pattern for the younger students, who do only slightly less preparation in each of the educational groups. The results suggest that our students make a realistic assessment of their abilities before starting their Open University study.

When we looked at occupation we found that some groups in our sample were too small for any significant assessment to be made. But some interesting differences emerged in the rest, as the following table shows:

Table 17: Preparation by selected occupations

	Housewives	Teachers	Professions & arts	Clerical & office	Retired
Over 60s					
Base = respondents	126	86	98	71	270
	%	%	%	%	%
No formal preparation	51	66	52	39	54
Some formal preparation	49	34	48	61	46
Under 60s					
Base = respondents	146	152	109	92	
	%	%	%	%	
No formal preparation	44	72	64	54	
Some formal preparation	56	28	36	46	

Among the over 60 students, teachers appear to have done the least preparation (34%) while the clerical workers have done nearly twice as much (61%). Slightly under half of the retired or unemployed, those who were in the professions and arts and housewives had prepared formally. The pattern for the under 60s is rather different; the numbers were very small in the retired group and no equivalent figures can be given. The younger housewives do more formal preparation than the older ones, (56% compared with 49%); and fewer clerical and office workers do as much as the older students in this category (61% to 46%). Teachers, however, are similar in both groups.

So far we have considered the percentages of both older and younger students who did some formal preparation and we have looked at differences between men and women, educational level and occupation.

When we looked at other kinds of preparation mentioned by the respondents we found that whatever the grouping, by age, educational level, sex or occupation, only a third or less had done private reading as preparation. The number of women who do private reading as preparation is a little lower than that of men among the older students and a little higher among the younger.

In the interviews we found out more about the kind of preparatory work which some students had done and what they thought about preparation. Those who had attended courses locally had taken general courses on how to study or else courses in subjects such as general science, literature or drama. But sometimes the opportunity was not there: one respondent who enrolled for a LEA class said that it was abandoned at half-term due to lack of support. There were other kinds of opportunity however; one student said that she thought that the group she attended for voluntary tutors in the Adult Literacy scheme had provided her with useful hints on how to study.

We asked students in interviews what advice they would give to anyone who was considering taking an Open University course. They said that they would urge others to do preparatory study before starting.

> "I have found it a great disadvantage not to have studied at A level".
>
> "There should be a more intensive preparatory course for older students".
>
> "Unless you have some educational background you are likely to flounder in the OU system".

Some thought that intending applicants ought to be warned of the need to be able to express themselves on paper.

> "It is very hard to do when you haven't done it for 50 years".

Future studies

Our question about study intentions after graduating with the OU also brought out a fairly marked difference between the older and younger students:

Table 18: Study intentions

Base = respondents	Over 60s 861	Under 60s 884
	%	%
Yes, other OU studies- associate short courses or pack	34	25
Don't know	25	34
Yes, but informally (reading) etc	19	11
Yes, a second degree with OU	8	8
Yes, with another institution	2	10
Definitely not	2	2
Other alternatives	8	9
No answer	2	2

The older students,despite their experience of arduous sustained study with the OU, showed considerable enthusiasm for going on: 63 per cent were intending to go on studying in some way or other, 42 per cent with the OU itself.

The younger students were much less certain than the older students about whether to go on studying, and 10 per cent of them were intending to study with another institution.

Once again we might conclude that, if our older students were in any way representative of their generation, as the whole population ages there would be a steady demand for educational opportunites. It was a striking finding that only two per cent of both the younger and the older students were determined never to study again!

Chapter 5: The experience of study

In this section we turn to the older students' actual experience of study with the OU . We examine whether this study met their expectations and see what pleasures and benefits they gained as well as what difficulties and problems they faced. Was the experience of OU study for these older students broadly similar to OU students generally? Or do older students form a distinctive group among our students, gaining particular satisfactions from their work and facing particular difficulties?

Study expectations

We asked our sample of older students what they had looked forward to gaining from studying with the Open University. Three main areas stood out clearly, being mentioned by more than two-thirds of the respondents:

- the pleasure of learning (79%)
- stimulation and new ideas to think or talk about (76%)
- a sense of achievement (67%)

The table below shows the pleasurable aspects of OU study which the older students anticipated, and indicates the extent to which these expectations were met. The fourth ranked expectation 'something positive to replace my career' was mentioned by 32 per cent of respondents (only 72 per cent of the sample had at this stage actually retired).

Table 19: Older students' expectations of OU study

	Expected	Happened
Base = respondents	861	861
	%	%
Pleasure of learning/studying	79	71
Stimulation : new ideas to think/talk about	76	71
A sense of achievement	67	55
Something positive to replace my career	32	28
Increased confidence/self-esteem	24	21
Better communication with people	18	16
Companionship	11	11
Mixing with younger people	10	15
More respect from family/friends	6	9
Other	4	4

The students' pleasurable expectations of OU study appear to have been largely fulfilled: 71 per cent said that they had gained pleasure from studying; 71 per cent felt that they had been stimulated; 55 per cent reported that they had felt a sense of achievement. One of the students interviewed described the experience thus:

> "plenty of shocks , but it was better than I expected. I'd been able to cope with the material and it was nice to find that out... I was forced to think far more than I had done and I found out some things about myself that I hadn't known as well".

and another believed

> "It's given me a terrific life which I didn't expect. It's given me knowledge and confidence, I hadn't much of that. I am more equal with other people. It helps to level you up with friends who have been to a university; and it is far harder than a conventional university. I have gained so many wonderful friends and tutors. My counsellor has helped me through all sorts of things".

It is clear that for some the OU is far more than just a hobby or a leisure activity; it becomes an important part of their life and an enriching experience.

Comparison with the under 60s students

The replies from our sample of under 60s students showed a similar pattern of pleasurable expectations/achievement,but there were some interesting differences. The same three expectations: pleasure of learning, stimulation and sense of achievement were identified by more than half of the students responding but the order was reversed; sense of achievement (77%), stimulation, new ideas to think about(75%) , pleasure of learning (62%).

No other items scored more than 50 per cent although 'better career prospects' (a choice not offered in the question to older students) was important for more than one in three students (38%). As with the older students, these three main expectations appear to have been fulfilled for the under 60s (See Appendix 6 for the table of under 60s expectations).

Educational background and perceptions of the Open University

We analysed the older students' educational qualifications to investigate whether there appeared to be any relationship between them and their expectations of the OU. The respondents were divided into three categories: Low qualifications (51%), Medium qualifications (19%) and High qualifications (30%).

For most of the 'pleasurable expectations', differences between the 'low', 'medium' and 'high' educational qualification groups were small, and did not appear to follow a clear pattern. However in three cases the differences are of interest.

Table 20: Pleasurable expectations of study and the extent to which they were achieved.

	Expected			Happened		
	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High
Base = respondents	425	152	241	425	152	241
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A sense of achievement	70	59	63	59	45	54
Better communication	23	18	9	21	14	10
Increased confidence	25	24	20	24	20	17

'A sense of achievement' was the second most common pleasurable expectation mentioned by the over 60 students and it was a theme which also strongly emerged in the follow up interviews. It would appear to be particularly important for those students with fewer formal educational qualifications, who in their youth may not have achieved their full potential. So too are 'better communications' and 'increased confidence'. The three expectations do appear to have been largely fulfilled by OU study. It was also striking that students with high level qualifications also expected to gain a sense of achievement from their work with the OU and that in most cases this did indeed come about. The full list of pleasurable expectations by educational qualifications can be found in Appendix 7.

Changes in leisure activities

Studying with the Open University takes up a lot of time. In order to find out what effect becoming a student had had on other activities we asked in the questionnaire which of their activities they had given up or restricted since they entered the OU.

The responses of both older and younger students are shown in the table below:

Table 21: Changes in leisure activities

	Over 60s		Under 60s	
	Activities current when started OU	Activities curtailed or restricted since	Activities current when started OU	Activities curtailed or restricted since
Base = respondents	861	861	884	884
	%	%	%	%
None	39	71	6	29
Gardening/DIY	57	27	45	29
Watching TV, listening to radio, music	56	27	66	41
Home-based hobbies	44	25	51	36
Visiting friends & relatives	39	15	50	25
Art, music, literary societies	28	13	20	9
Voluntary social work	27	9	13	7
Religious, church activities	25	5	12	4
Sporting activities	17	6	37	18
Political activities	8	4	7	5
Womens' organizations	8	4	5	3
Other	19	9	16	10

About half of the respondents among the older students mentioned as interests, before they began OU study, gardening, DIY, watching TV, listening to the radio or music, and home-based hobbies; about half of these stopped or restricted these activities after they had started to study. Other activities which were mentioned by fewer students seem to have been less affected; for example, church activities were reduced by only one fifth and voluntary social work by one third. What is most striking, however, is that a third of the over 60 students did not restrict or curtail any activity. This gives further

support to our overall view that in the over 60 students we have a group of people who can cope with the organization of higher level study without totally disrupting their lives.

In contrast, as the table shows, the responses of the under 60 students gives evidence of rather more disturbance to their former interests. Only 23 per cent said there was no restriction in their activities at all; and for many activities we see a level of restriction of about half to two thirds.

In interviews some older students talked about conflicting activities, one student of 70 said that she had to limit the time she could give to her ten grandchildren. The secretary of a local Cruse Club said that constant telephone calls interrupted her study; gardeners and golfers complained about their lack of time in the summer months.

But, as we have seen, our older students seem to lead a busy life and cope with it. One older learner's comment was:

> "I would warn applicants that the OU is not geared for people who are not triers. And of course, if they don't like the idea of being committed to several hours a week studying, they won't enjoy it".

Study materials and methods

We have seen that studying with the OU does involve some sacrifice of interests and activities but on the whole older students appear to cope well with degree level study (see chapter 6, Academic Performance). Some older students did worry as to whether they would be able to cope with OU materials and the organisation of their studies and the written assignment work.

Table 22: Difficulties with OU study- older students

	Expected	Happened
Base = respondents	861	861
	%	%
Difficulty understanding the units	29	8
Difficulty with coping with the pace/organisation of study	45	12
Difficulty with the written work	12	7

In the event few students had difficulty in understanding the units or in coping with the written work, but problems in pacing and organising work were a little more common.

The interviews illustrated the way that individual students' study patterns varied. Some students had a fixed daily routine:

> "I came home from work, had my meal, listened to the Archers-I'm a great Archer fan - then I settled down from 7.30 - 12.00, then bed and up at 5.45 to walk the dogs".

Other students had less formally ordered study patterns:

> " I fit it in when I can. I do machinery repairs in my spare time".

For a few students Open University study appears to have become a full-time occupation, a replacement for work:

> "I work regularly on four to five days a week, doing three hours in the forenoon and two in the afternoon".

But for others, the retirement of a partner can sometimes disrupt the students' routine.

> "However, my husband has recently retired and I am finding that he is making different demands, which include coffee/tea breaks and lunches: which are new domestic chores and upset my routine".

Student support services

Open University study is by no means all at a distance. The university has always attached great importance to its local support services and summer schools.

Looking at figure 4 which shows the use of student support services, we find that 67 per cent of older students said that they attended tutorials at their study centre regularly, compared with 52 per cent of the younger group and 86 per cent attended tutorials regularly or sometimes compared with the figure of 80 per cent for the younger group (see Appendix 8 for the full table).

Although the majority of older students went to tutorials regularly and valued the help they received, a few of those interviewed found the experience of first attendance difficult, or felt that the tutorials could have been more helpfully organised for them.

> "You must be prepared for the back to the schoolroom atmosphere and make allowances, otherwise you might as well not try".
>
> "Some tutors (A) are prolific blackboard and chalk writers, and unless you can see and write it all down, in note form as it is written, it usually is erased from the mind as it is wiped off the board. Some tutors (B) come prepared with photocopies of their tutorials, giving one a chance to listen and retain, by this aide memoire. I prefer the 'B' type tutor".

Patterns of attendance at Saturday day schools showed considerable differences between older and younger groups. 36 per cent of older students regularly attended day schools; this increased to 54 per cent when aggregated with those who attended sometimes. For the younger group these figures were 22 per cent and 42 per cent respectively.

All the older students who mentioned Saturday day schools during interviews found them helpful.

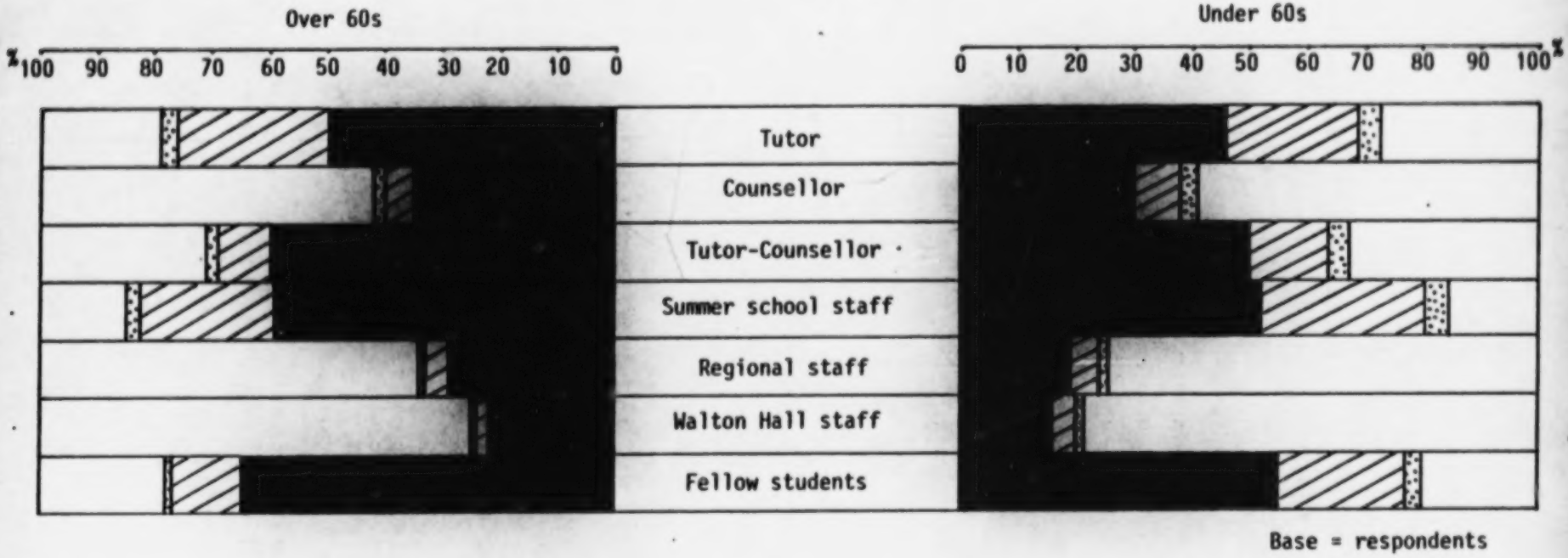
> "I would like to see more day schools and perhaps a mini-summer school".

A small number of older students had taken part in telephone tutorials(4%) and one student wrote:

> "I have found that telephone tutorials are a boon to anyone unable to attend study centres. To return to study after forty years was a daunting prospect, but this gave me a bit of confidence and encouragement".

In addition one in ten of the older students and a similar proportion of younger students were members of self help groups which met regularly.

Figure 5 Student contact with OU staff and other students



Non use of student stupport services

Approximately 4 in 10 of both the over 60s and the under 60s indicated that they would have liked to have used the student support services more than they had been able to (42% of older students, 44% of younger students). They were asked to indicate the reasons that prevented them from making greater use of these facilities.

Table 23: Problems in using facilities over and under 60s

	Over 60s	Under 60s
Base = respondents	861	884
	%	%
Time unsuitable	16	23
Transport difficulties	14	11
Place unsuitable	12	14
Travel too expensive	9	7
Ill health	7	2
Disability	6	1

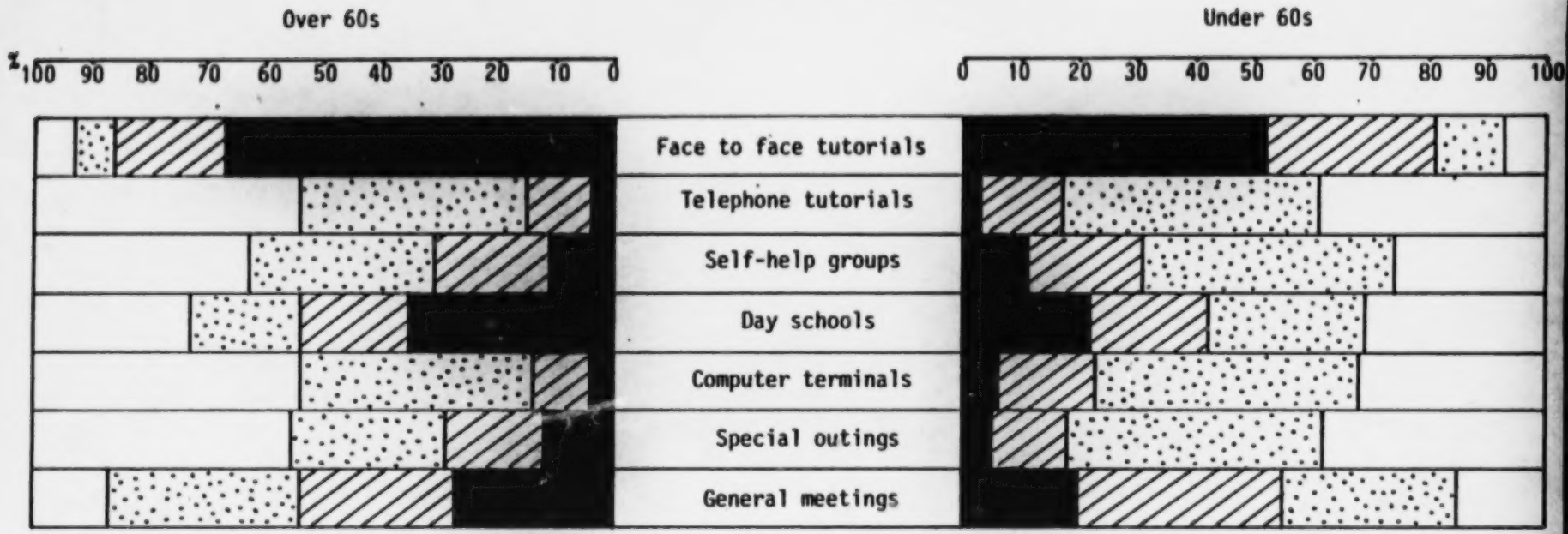
'Time unsuitable' and 'transport difficulties' were the two most common reasons mentioned by both the over and under 60s. The 'time' element was particularly noticeable for the younger students. Several older students when interviewed made comments referring to transport difficulties.

> "I found face-to-face tutorials very helpful indeed, but the venue for my tutorials has mostly been in central London, an hour's journey each way.... most people of my age group are uneasy about travelling into London alone on dark evenings".

Student attitudes towards OU staff

Students (figure 5) were asked how they felt about their contact with OU staff, part-time tutors, counsellors or in their foundation year tutor counsellors. About half of the older students were happy with their tutors; a further quarter were happy but had some reservations. This figure was slightly (7%) higher than that for the younger group. Of the older group only 5 per cent had had no contact with their tutor, compared with 10 per cent for the younger group. (Appendix 9 gives the full figures).

Figure 4: Use of student support services- over 60s and under 60s



Base = respondents

Key

- Regularly
- Sometimes
- Not at all
- Not available/ no answer

However, there were a few older students who were unhappy about the attitude of tutors towards them and they made additional comments on their questionnaires-

> "A problem outside our control is the attitude of some younger tutors to older students- impatience, resentment, refusing to take one seriously".

and the extreme comment was:

> "I was treated like an idiot child by my tutor counsellor".

Of the older group only one per cent said that they were unhappy with their counsellor compared with three per cent for the younger group. It would appear that those students who do have contact with their counsellor are getting the service they want.

The majority of older students did not find it a problem being taught by younger staff, less than two per cent felt uneasy or unhappy, of the remainder 56 per cent were stimulated or pleased and 30 per cent were neutral.

Summer schools

Figure 5 on staff and student contact showed students' reactions to summer school staff; 60 per cent of the older students found summer school staff helpful, with an additional 23 per cent happy but with some reservations.

Most interviewees commented favourably on summer schools, although a few confessed to being nervous beforehand. There were also those students who gained little from summer school and believed that attendance should be optional .

> "Yes, I have been to summer schools and enjoyed them enormously. I get a great deal out of them and enjoyed the contact with younger people- altogether a great success".

> "In the past I have found no benefit whatsoever from attending three..., I have chosen courses mainly because they do not have a summer school requirement. This is not good, summer schools should be voluntary, at any rate for the elderly".

Opinion among students was divided about the social dimension of summer school. Most felt that they were perfectly able to pace their social lives. Those who wished to join in did so, others went to bed early. One student said:

> "I like meeting younger people. I don't feel out of place. I don't care too much for socialising in the bars and try to avoid rowdies".

Problems older students encountered

We asked older students about the problems they expected to experience with OU study and the extent to which they occurred.

Table 24: Problems for older students

	Expected	Happened
Base = respondents	861	861
	%	%
I was worried about my memory	47	26
Difficulty with coping with the pace/organisation of study	45	12
I was worried by the thought of exams, assessment etc.	42	27
Difficulty understanding the units	29	8
I wondered whether my health would be a problem	16	10
I thought I might have problems finding the money for fees	16	11
Difficulty with the written work	12	7
I thought I might not fit in	10	1
I thought I might lose contact with friends	4	3
Other	7	5
No answer	35	57

Problems in general

The response of our older students to the questions on how events had turned out in practice was much lower (43%) than to the question about what issues were expected to cause problems (65%). We have already discussed student difficulties with understanding the units and coping with the pace/organisation of study (pp45-46). Nearly half the older students worried in advance about their memory; about a quarter thought those worries were in practice justified: 42 per cent were worried by the prospect of examinations and assessment; 27 per cent thought their worries were justified: nearly ten per cent thought they would not fit in to the OU; fewer than one per cent found this was the case. We think of the thousands of older people whose anxieties on matters like these may inhibit them from joining the OU or any of the other institutions open to them who would in practice find themselves enjoying and profiting from their studies.

We examine certain key issues below.

Memory

An important worry for the older students is that their memory might be failing. This was a worry for 47 per cent of our respondents and for over half of them this problem did occur. In the interviews, students expressed anxiety about 'slowing down', 'inability to concentrate' and 'short-term' memory.

"I have a couple of sentences in mind, I write one and then find I cannot remember the second one and need some time to recover it."

"I find that I don't learn so quickly and can easily forget things."

A number of students raised the issue of what constitutes a 'useful' length of time to spend in study; this is clearly a matter of some concern. Many students find they can only concentrate for short periods and some say their best work is done in the morning.

Examinations

Many older students feel that their inability to concentrate for any length of time affects their ability to cope successfully with exams. Examinations were often mentioned by students as a source of stress. Some 42 per cent of older students expected to have problems with exams or assessment and for nearly two thirds of them these problems materialised. Some concerns were historical:

"I have always found exams difficult even as a student at university. I feel I perform very badly."

Others linked this fear to worries about their memory, feeling that they must remember every fact as they needed to at school:

"Yes, I found it very difficult. I was worried I would not be able to assimilate information, retain it and produce it at the right time."

In some cases students felt that their slowing down with age affected their exam performance more than any other aspect of their studies and this was illustrated in our interviews.

"As you get older you get slower. I have never felt I have done justice to myself in exams."

Another student considered it to be part of her 'attitude'.

"My attitude is very bad, I can't face up to them. I can't look at the specimen exam paper. Once I get into the exam I am far better and can work well for three hours."

It may be difficult for staff to realise the tensions which exams cause for some older people, who remember punishment for forgetting in school tests and the importance attached to passing or failing 'scholarship' or 'matriculation' many years before. There are a variety of ways in which the OU tries to allay

these fears and to take account of any deterioration in physical powers. These include working through specimen exam papers, tutorial sessions devoted to revision and exam techniques, allowing rest breaks during examinations and allowing extra time for completing the paper.

Disabilities

Many older students are handicapped by physical disabilities.

Table 25: Percentage disabled by age group - all OU students 1981

	Number in group	Number disabled	% disabled
70 and over	437	98	22.4
65-69	821	106	12.9
60-64	1,439	186	12.9
Under 60	57,906	2,557	4.4

It should be noted that the Open University's definition of disabled is a wide one. The term disabled is applied to all students requiring special provision for illness or physical difficulty.

As would be expected this table shows that such disability is related quite strongly to age. Nearly one in four of the 70 and over group and one in eight of the 60-69 group are disabled, compared to one in forty for the under 60s.

Partial loss of hearing and sight, arthritis and rheumatic ailments are common disabilities among the elderly: but many older people accept (and are encouraged by relatives and doctors to accept) such disabilities as a natural part of the ageing process and thus hesitate to describe themselves as disabled. Our figures for older students who are disabled are consequently likely to be understated.

Loss of hearing presents particular difficulties. Transcripts for television and radio broadcasts are available, but some students felt they had missed a lot from not being able to participate in tutorials. As one student said

> "The younger students, after a few minutes of trying to speak up, drop back into their customary mumble".

But one of the students interviewed found the inductive loop which was provided very helpful and enjoyed the Hearing Impaired Summer School more than any other he attended.

Comments from some students suggested that students born with a disability or disabled at a comparatively early age had been able to 'grow up with' a disability and were therefore at less of a disadvantage than those 'newly-disabled' through age. The long-term disabled have learnt to organise themselves to take account of their disability, like this partially-sighted student:

> "Last year I used 250 tapes: they are difficult to cope with and you have to be careful to get them in order. The OU sends them in Jiffy bags, without any boxes, and they are not clearly labelled. I can see them under my viewer but it takes time to sort them out. The only way to do this is to put them in a rack in the right order ; unless I am careless I can then go back and find them".

Conversely, newly disabled students- among whom we must include many of the elderly- can have problems in adjusting to a new way of life. One London student said:

> "I had an accident and lost my memory last year. I lost my driving licence after that. I had been driving for 52 years".

As a result this student could no longer visit the study centre.

Lack of mobility - because a student is no longer able to drive - is a particular problem faced by some of our older students. The demands of the OU in terms of tutorials, day schools and summer schools, can be considerable. Public transport may be the answer in large towns, but in rural areas buses can be few and far between.

Finance

A number of students, some 11 per cent, experienced financial problems. One student said:

> "The OU is pricing itself out of the Old Age Pensioners Market".

We supplemented our own evidence by drawing on the work of Blacklock [1] on Open University student costs. Her study included students over age 55 but the size of her sample of students in this age group was small.

Table 26: Annual incomes of Open University students 1982

	55 & over age group			
	Male	Female	All	All age groups
Base = respondents	53	42	97	1,519
	%	%	%	%
Under £4,160	13	33	22	10
£4,160 but less than £5,200	4	10	6	7
£5,200 " " " £8,320	30	24	27	26
£8,320 " " " £10,400	17	2	12	19
£10,400 " " " £15,600	24	14	20	23
£15,600 and over	9	14	11	5
No information	2	2	2	6

The incomes of the older OU students in this study, then, had a wider range than those of younger students. More than twice as many older students had less than £4,160, and at the same time more than twice as many had more than £15,600. The lower incomes can be attributed to the general decline in income which takes place on retirement; the higher incomes in the sample, we can guess, to a tendency for some better-off people to look for interesting educational opportunities as they get older. These two features were particularly marked amongst the women in the sample: in comparison with the all-age group more than three times as many women had less than £4,160: but nearly three times as many women had £15,600 or more.

We note in passing that we found no evidence in our research of any kind of mutual distrust and hostility between these two groups of older students: as in other ways, the mutual experience of being Open University students is a powerful unifying factor.

Blacklock warns us against too sanguine a view of the circumstances of older OU students, particularly in the changing conditions of the 1980's.

> "..... we should not allow ourselves to remain complacent. The 1980 survey found that among the over 55s, 52 per cent experienced financial difficulties, compared to 36 per cent of their younger fellows; the results of the two subsequent year's surveys imply that increasing fees and declining aid have perhaps already moved us to the point where we exclude all but the financially independent older students".

and

> "analysis by age reinforces the suggestion made earlier that older students must know they have sufficient funds to be financially independent before embarking on an OU degree- only 16 per cent of all new students aged 55 years or more received any help with their tuition fees".

Most older students then finance their studies from pensions or independent means.

Many older students spend more on their studies than younger students.

One student commented to us:

> "the cost of textbooks or set books in some course is very high".

Blacklock's view was that:

> "their expenditure was higher for most items... the fact that this older group spent more on books, equipment and records confirms the suggestion made earlier... that our older intake has been pruned in favour of those who can well afford it!"

Although it is important to recognise that some of the over 60s do experience severe problems, it should be borne in mind that on the whole student anxieties diminish as they became familiar with the Open University system and master the necessary academic skills and study disciplines. Far from feeling disadvantaged, many of the older students interviewed believed that conditions were better for them than for the under 60s, who may have less time available for study and be under greater pressure because of work and family commitments.

One student summed up her experience as follows:

> "Yes, our memory is not so good in general. But I think the older students have got it over the younger ones; we haven't the money for holidays or for a lot of socialising, and that means we have more opportunity and time to study".

Reference

Blacklock S. Student Costs and Hardship in 1983 SRD 259

Chapter 6: Their academic performance

This chapter is based upon material derived from Morrison's analysis of the performance of all the 2826 students aged over 60 in the Open University in 1982. We did not ask specific questions about academic performance in our questionnaire, but the students' responses on matters such as examinations, memory and pace of study, which are closely related to academic performance have been discussed in chapter 5 and elsewhere. The students we interviewed also of course made comments relevant to academic performance. But we are concerned here primarily with evidence about the workloads, choice of courses, drop-out rate, continuous assessment scores and examination scores of the whole student population.

Workload

The analysis of the workload of students shows that although the majority of <u>all</u> age groups study just one course a year, these percentages are slightly higher for students over 60 than under 60. The maximum number of credits which Open University students are permitted to study in a year is two, and as many students over 60 take two full credits or their equivalent as do the under 60s.

Table 27: Workload of OU students 1982

	Under 60	60-64	65-69	70 and over	All students
Base = finally registered students	61,596	1,576	833	417	64,422
Credits	%	%	%	%	%
One ½	20	22	23	30	20
One full	62	66	66	62	62
Two ½'s	12	7	5	4	11
One full, one ½	4	3	3	1	4
Three ½'s	1	0	1	0	1
Two full or equivalent	2	2	2	2	2

Some students in their 60s, therefore, while a little more realistic than younger students, are fairly ambitious in the workloads they undertake, in spite of their doubts about coping with the pace of study:

"I read and assimilate knowledge very much more slowly than the OU expects"

and

"I require more time to assimilate information.....".

Over age 70, many students become somewhat less ambitious, 30 per cent of them attempting half-credit courses only: but even then, a stubborn 2 per cent persist in taking two full credits or a full and two half credits!

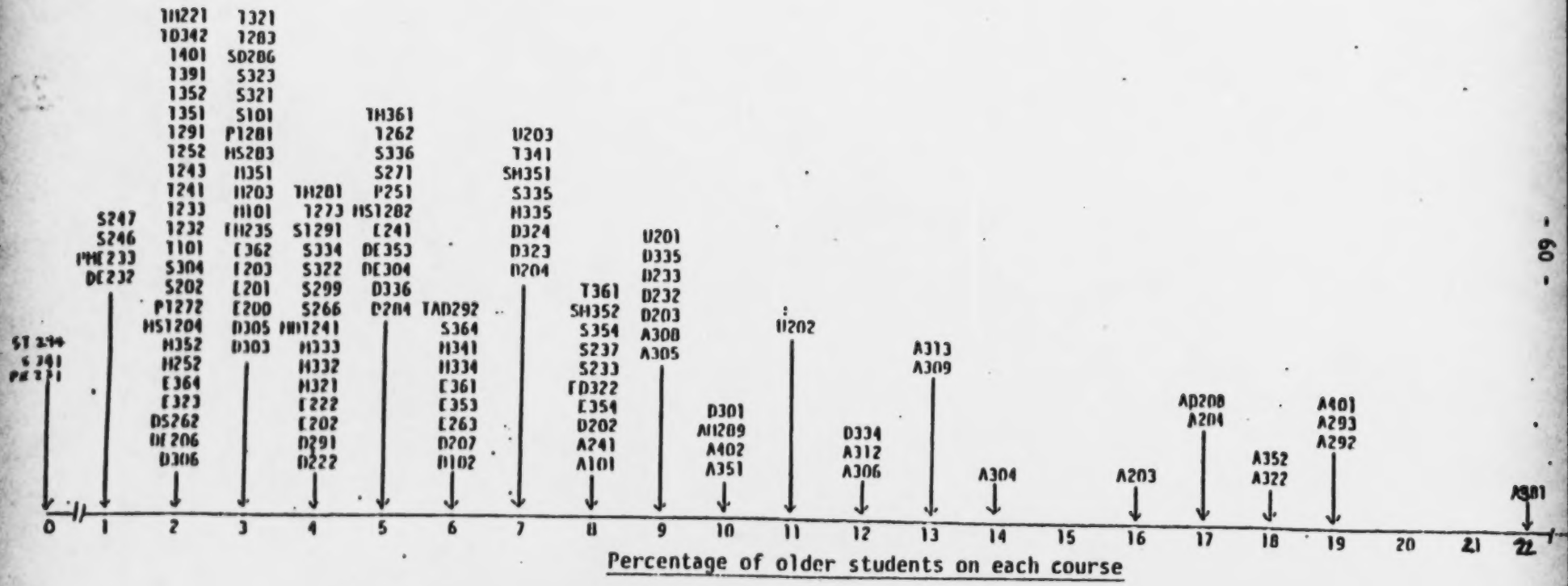
Course choice

Figure 6 shows the percentage of older students on each course in 1982 (in this case a standard OU analysis, based on birth in 1925 or before, related to students aged 57 and over). If older students were distributed equally across all courses, each course could expect about 5 per cent of the students to be from the older group. This is clearly not the case: three courses, two in Science, one in Education, had no older students at all; at the other extreme, for the most popular course, A381 Science and Belief: from Darwin to Einstein, nearly one in four of the students were 57 or over. Older students in fact strongly favour Arts courses;* for all Arts courses the average proportion of older students is about 13 per cent, and the top twelve courses for older students were all in Arts. Within the range of Arts courses, the most popular were in history, philosophy, art history, religion and music. After Arts courses, the most popular were Social Science courses dealing with sociological and political issues. Among the most popular Science courses was S354- Understanding space and time. But the most striking feature of this analysis is the popularity of the more difficult third level courses amongst older students. Four of the six more popular courses were at third level: so was the most popular course of all (A381); the most popular Social Science course (D334); the most popular Maths course (M335); the most popular Technology course (T361); two of the four top

*(In Woodley's study of mature university students,[1] of the 174 students over 51, 59 per cent were studying Arts, 30 per cent Social Science and 11 per cent Science)

Figure 6

COURSE CHOICE OF THOSE BORN 1925 OR EARLIER (AGED 57 OR OLDER) 1982



Note: *The letter at the beginning of the course code indicates the faculty which produced the course.*
A = Arts, D = Social Science, M = Mathematics, E = Educational studies, S = Science, T = Technology, U = University course.
Some courses are inter-faculty courses, e.g. AD = Joint Arts & Social Science course. The first number after the letter indicates the level of the course, from 1 (foundation course) to 4 (4th level course)

Science courses (S354, SM352); and the two top Education courses (E354, ED322). If we add this evidence of the rigour of the courses attempted to that discussed above on the number of courses attempted, we have a picture of older students, in spite of fears about memory loss and the pace of study, nevertheless heading courageously towards the frontiers of knowledge!

Drop-out

Open University students may stop studying, or 'drop-out', at various points in the year. Some will drop-out early, between allocation to courses and registration (before paying their full tuition fees), others will drop-out at a later stage, between registration and the examination (and after paying their fees) The table below shows the drop-out figures for various age-groups in 1982.

Table 28: Drop-out in 1982

	Under 60	60-64	65 and over	All students
	%	%	%	%
Drop - out				
between allocation and registration	20	15	17	20
between registration and examination	24	21	23	24

Older students, then, have a slightly lower drop-out rate than under 60s at both stages, and the 60-64 age group has the lowest drop-out rate. So our developing picture is of students, many of them nearing retirement or recently retired, who often take on difficult courses, and then persist doggedly with them.

Assessment

The Open University's assessment system consists of two components: continuous assessment (tutor-marked assignments of varying length and character, and in addition for some courses, multiple-choice computer-marked assignments); and an end-of-year examination. We shall consider

older students performance in each of these components separately , and then as the overall pass rate following the conflation of the two scores.

Continuous assessment

The following table compares the scores of older students with those of all students in 1982.

Table 29: Overall continuous assessment scores 1982

	60-69	70 & over	All older students	Under 60s	All students
Base = finally registered student courses	2,708	452	3,160	73,598	76,758
Score:	%	%	%	%	%
0 - 39.9	22	23	22	25	25
40- 69.9	39	47	40	31	31
70- 100	39	30	38	44	44

The older students, then, do much better than under 60s in the middle range of scores (40-69.9%), and fewer of them do very well or very poorly. If we look at the range 40-100 per cent - the typical range over which a student may be considered to have 'passed' continuous assessment* then older students are a little more successful (78%) than their younger colleagues (75%). When we compare the performance of the two sub-groups of older students, we see that the 60-69 group are more successful over the range 70-100 per cent than the over 70s (39% compared with 30%). But perhaps the most remarkable feature of this particular analysis is that a greater proportion even of the 70 and over students (77%) obtain a continuous assessment score in the range 40-100 per cent than the under 60s (75%). Admittedly the samples are quite different in size - there being only 452 students aged 70 and over, and 62,800 younger students. Nevertheless we can continue to develop our picture of these older students, who persist with their courses and work diligently to achieve satisfactory continuous assessment grades.

*Most students obtaining marks in this range will be deemed to have passed although this is not always so.

Examinations

The table below sets out the examination scores for all those students of the various age groups who sat examinations in 1982.

Table 30: Examination scores 1982

	60-69	70 & over	All older students	Under 60s	All students
Base* = those who sat the main examination	2,081	346	2,427	54,232	56,659
Score:	%	%	%	%	%
0 - 39	14	23	15	10	10
40 - 69	73	71	72	63	63
70 - 100	14	6	12	27	27

It is clear that examinations are a difficult hurdle for older Open University students: though most of them clear the hurdle, they do so less easily than their younger colleagues. When the older students are compared with the under 60s, over the range 40 - 100 per cent, the typical 'pass' range, the older students (84%) are slightly less successful than the under 60s (90%). A greater proportion of older students (72%) obtain marks in the lower pass range of 40-69 per cent than the under 60s (63%) , but far fewer of them (12% compared with 27%) are found in the higher pass range of 70 - 100 per cent. When we compare the two older sub-groups, we can see that the 60-69 group is more successful (87%) than the 70 and over group (77%) over the typical pass range of 40-100 per cent. In this particular range, in fact, the 60 - 69s are only slightly less successful than the under 60s.

Here then, in the formal three-hour examination, is an area when the anxieties of older students, discussed in Chapter 5 and elsewhere do seem to have some justification.

> "I was worried about my memory, it was poor and it is getting worse"
>
> ".... I found three hours too brief a time to complete four short essays"
>
> "I have particular difficulty in recalling what I have learned. I particularly notice in exams, when facts that I should have at my finger tips elude me until the exam is over and come flooding in".

*some students sat examinations for more than one course and so will be counted more than once

These older students found it more difficult to pass the examination (14% of the 60-69s in the 0-39 band compared with 10% of under 60s), and this became still more difficult as they got older (23% of 70 plus students in the 0-39 band). They found it even more difficult to get 'good' scores, and this too became more difficult again as they got older (only 6% of 70 plus students in the 70-100 band). We shall, for the present, leave this important topic- reminding ourselves of the positive fact that 84 per cent of all the older students obtained pass grades in these university-level examinations. We return to it again in the discussion.

Pass rates

When we conflate the continuous assessment and the examination scores to obtain the overall pass rates - thus balancing the slight advantage of older students in lower drop-out and more consistent continuous assessment scores against the better examination scores of the younger students- we see that older students as a whole do only slightly less well than younger students.

Table 31: Percentages passing in 1982

	60-64	65 & over	All older students	Under 60s	All students
Base = finally registered students	1,246	817	2,063	62,341	64,422
	%	%	%	%	%
Passed all courses*	69	64	67	67	67
Passed some but not all courses	3	2	2	4	4
Passed no courses	28	35	31	29	29

The most striking point in this table is the success of those aged 60-64.

* some students will be registered for more than one course

Graduation rates

For most Open University students gaining a degree is the culmination of their studies. However, from the earlier discussion on motives (Chapter 4), it is clear that the over 60s are not as concerned with getting a degree as the under 60s. Only half of them (compared with three quarters of the under 60s) indicated this as a reason for studying. Nevertheless, surprising numbers of students who were over 60 when they started with the university have now graduated and some have even gone on to achieve honours. Up till the end of 1983, over 960 students had been awarded a 6-credit BA and over 140 had qualified for honours.

In order to compare the graduation rates of all age groups, we shall look at the pattern generated by the first three intakes to the university combined. The data for these students demonstrates the completion levels as nearly as possible, since very few students from these years who have not yet graduated will now do so.

Table 32: Graduation rates by age when starting for students who entered the university in 1971-1973

	No. registered for study	No. awarded 6-credit BA	% awarded 6-credit BA	No. qualifying for honours	% qualifying for honours
Age at start:					
Under 25	5,867	2,826	48.2	583	9.9
25-34	20,089	10,838	53.9	2,409	12.0
35-44	12,834	7,516	58.6	1,785	13.9
45-59	7,606	4,278	56.2	1,121	14.7
Over 60	711	311	43.7	88	12.4

The over 60s have the lowest graduation rate for 6 credit BA but this is only just lower than that for the youngest group, the under 25s. At honours level, however, our first over 60s do better than the two youngest groups. (Patterns for later intakes at present indicate that this high relative success rate at honours level has not continued and that our over 60s overall will behave more like these at 6-credit BA level. On the other hand, it may merely be an indication that older students take longer than younger students to qualify for honours.)

Although it is clear that over 60s have low rates of graduation, this may be as much a reflection of their particular ambitions as of their academic stamina.

We can then complete our composite picture of the academic performance of the older Open University students we studied. Nearing retirement or recently retired, most of them are in no special hurry to obtain a qualification; so they make a sensible choice of courses each year, normally taking a single full course (66%) or a single half-course (22%). On the other hand, their choice of subject is more ambitious; it is often a third-level course in an abstract and conceptually difficult area. They then work steadily away at the course, with lower drop-out rates than younger students and more consistent continuous assessment grades. The formal end of year examination does present them with problems, but surprising numbers nevertheless obtain pass grades in the examination, and in the end the 60-64 year olds get more overall passes than younger students. In their late 60s and 70s the going gets a bit more difficult, but 65 per cent of over 65 year olds still pass their Open University examinations, and may persist to graduation.

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Chapter 7: Discussion

Reviewing as it does the academic performance of over 2,800 people, and the attitudes of 861 of them ,this has been, we believe, the largest and most detailed study of older students in higher education yet undertaken (the study by Levet-Gautrat and others discussed below is of students in adult education). The evidence our study presents is therefore of considerable interest.

In seeking to draw some conclusions, we must of course recognize our study's limitations. Although large, our group possessed very distinctive characteristics. It was highly self-selected: these were people who had decided to join the Open University and to undertake its particular form of distance learning; and most of them were also among those who had coped with Open University study for some time. This was, as we discovered, a group of educational enthusiasts, most of whom had in general enjoyed school, and who had thereafter undertaken courses of various kinds throughout their lives. These students were also historically distinctive. They were, as we saw in Chapter 3, a generation which had grown up in the depression years of the 1930's, during the Second World War and the period of post-war reconstruction. Their determination to look on the bright side and to make the best of things may well owe something to that history. It might be argued therefore that the quality of academic performance that we found had much to do with the temperament and experience of our study population.

We must remember, on the other hand, that in addition to such supposed advantages, our students were also, in their degree-level studies, coping with what would normally be thought of as significant disadvantages. We found that among all Open University students, some 13 per cent of the students in their sixties and 22 per cent of the students aged seventy and over report some form of physical disability: of our own study sample, 12 per cent said that ill-health or disability had interrupted their Open University studies. As to finance, Blacklock's study showed that twice as many older students were in the lowest income bracket as younger students (Chapter 5). So there are significant negative personal factors to place against the positive factors arising from self-selection.

In considering the performance of these older students, we must also weigh the effects of several educational factors. Of the older students in the OU 50 per cent had left school at 16 or younger, and 18 per cent had no formal

qualifications. It seems likely then that many of these students have not taken a formal examination for forty or fifty years. The contrast in matters of familiarity and practice with the younger students, most of whom had grown up in the era of GCE 'O' and 'A' level exams, and 70 per cent of whom had an 'A' level or higher qualification, might in itself be sufficient to account for the relative weakness of the older students in examination performances.

Universities of the Third Age

There is now a vast and constantly growing literature, both in Europe and in the United States, on the cognitive development of older people, on their learning styles, and on the educational process in later life. We do not propose in this present report to attempt the massive task of summarising the present state of knowledge in this area, or of suggesting what contribution our own evidence may make to it: that will be a separate undertaking. We will however note one large scale study with features very similar to our own. This is the survey of students at Universities of the Third Age, published in 1982 by Maximilienne Levet-Gautrat in collaboration with Monique Buras-Tugendhaft[1]. It is based on a questionnaire completed by 1,501 students in sixteen U3As in France, two in Belgium, two in Canada, and from the club of retired French teachers of MGEN (Mutuelle Générale de l'Education Nationale). It was of course impossible to get a representative sample from so many diverse and indepdendent organisations, even though they have so much in common. From the responses we do, however, get one picture of the demographic characteristics of the Third Age students, a view of their motives in studying, the kinds of courses which they choose, their attitudes to teaching methods, and the social relationships which are found in these U3As.

The age range of the U3A respondents was from 44 to 90 (though only 10 of the 1,500 were under 50); 53 per cent were in the 60-69 group and 26 per cent were in the 70-90 group. There are some differences from our Open University sample, the most striking being the sex ratio: 70 per cent of U3A students being men and 30 per cent women. There were also some differences in professional status in the U3A: 8 per cent are in the upper professional group, 48 per cent in the middle group and 28 per cent in the lower occupational group. But the similarities with O.U. students are interesting; 16 per cent of U3A students have degrees and 16 per cent low or no qualifications; there are many more men than women with higher

qualifications (29 per cent as opposed to 12 per cent). Most of the men are married, whereas the women are divided more equally into married, single, widowed or divorced.

Over 70 per cent of the U3A respondents have other activities and interests in addition to their studies. More than half give personal development in the field of culture as their main motive for study, linking this with making up for lost opportunities; and another 20 per cent give continued activity and development as a main motive. Two-thirds of the respondents are interested mainly in languages or the humanities, but only 12 per cent in science and mathematics. Many approve of modern teaching methods; and while some 20 per cent prefer younger teachers, most express no particular preference in this respect. The responses on social relationships in the U3A suggest friendly, though not close relations, and a marked preference for small group work.

Over 80 per cent of the respondents thought it was important to exercise their memory. The overall impression given in the U3A survey is of active alert people, aware of the importance of continuing activity for their own well-being. There are many echoes in the survey of the attitudes of our own over 60s.

The Open University and the Older Student

We turn finally to the question which first prompted our enquiries: should the Open University make special provision for the many older people in its student body? The answer, we believe, should be No. We do believe that it is important to make full and part-time staff, and fellow students, more alert to some of the particular concerns of older people so that help where appropriate can be provided. But to go further, and to make systematic arrangements for all older students would, we believe, be to run (quite unnecessarily) the risk of the kind of ageism and stereotyping which we would in other circumstances deplore.

There are certain problems which do concern many older people. Some 47 per cent cent of our sample anticipated problems with their memory and some 26 per cent experienced difficulty. The University should be sensitive to the magnitude of this concern and should recognize that examinations for example can be particularly stressful. The special help and assistance that is currently available, including additional time for answering questions, should be clearly offered in such a way that all older students needing it can benefit.

For others, as our research showed, this very process of testing themselves against a strenuous academic programme is an important motivating factor.

Other problem areas such as disability and financial worries can be found amongst all students and are perhaps best tackled as all-age issues. But sources of financial support such as the Financial Assistance Fund should recognize that the income and expenditure patterns of older students may not be the same as those of other students; although they may not have dependent relatives and their mortgage repayments may have been completed, older students may have other outgoings or they may be relying on their savings to finance OU study. The criteria for assistance should take into account these differences, so that older students who may be in real need are eligible for help.

The Open University did not, of course, set out to devise an educational programme particularly suited to lively and ambitious people over the age of 60: but our evidence suggests that the combination of home-based learning with a regional support service does in fact provide such a programme. There are other kinds of older students who of course need other kinds of educational provision: and we have always to remind ourselves of Tough's suggestion that 80 per cent of all adult learning is planned by non-professionals, mostly by the learners themselves [2]. But we believe that our survey has shown that many older people are stimulated and refreshed by participation in a home-based learning system with a rigorous form of assessment and challenging academic content.

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Appendix 1: Full occupation and educational background categories

Occupations

Full-time housewives

Engaged on unpaid domestic duties and no paid part-time work.

Housewives with paid part-time jobs

Engaged on unpaid domestic duties but in paid part-time employment for up to twenty hours a week.

Armed Forces

British and foreign.

Administrators and managers

Central government, local government-administrative grades, nationalised industries and private industry.

Teachers in nursery and primary schools

In nursery,primary, middle, deemed primary, and preparatory schools.

Teachers in secondary schools

In secondary and middle, deemed secondary, schools, sixth-form colleges etc.

Teachers in further, higher or adult education

In further education colleges, colleges of education, polytechnics, universities etc.

Other teachers, instructors, educational advisers, etc

Training officers, technical instructors, apprenticeship supervisors, educational advisers (not driving instructors).

Medical and health-related professions

Doctors, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, opticians, radiographers, occupational therapists, public health inspectors, etc.

Social welfare and personal social services

Social workers, probation officers, NSPCC officers, community development officers etc.

Other profession and arts

Authors, journalists, actors, musicians, artists, producers.
Advertising, public relations, market research.
Accountants, company secretaries, lawyers, clergy.
Architects, surveyors, town planners.
Librarians.

Qualified scientists and engineers

Chemical, physical and biological scientists.
Chartered engineers- civil, structural, mechanical, electrical, electronic, aeronautical, production, mining and work-study engineers etc.

Technical personnel:including data processing, draughtsmen and technicians

Draughtsmen, lab assistants, technicians.
Systems analysits, computer programmers, time and motion, O & M.
Scientific, technical, engineering assistants and related workers.

Electrical, electronic, metal and machines, engineering and allied trades.

Electricians, electrical and electronic fitters and assemblers.
Plumbers, welders, fitters, sheet metal workers, metal workers, machine toolsetters and operators, mechanics, toolmakers.

Farming, mining, construction and other manufacturing

Farmers, forestry and fishermen, miners, quarrymen.
Gas, coke and chemicals, glass and ceramics, furnace, forge, foundry and rolling mills, woodworkers, leather, textiles, clothing.
Food, drink, tobacco, paper and printing.
Builders, bricklayers, plasterers, painters.
Warehousemen, packers, labourers etc.

Communications and transport:air, sea, road and rail.

Drivers, railwaymen, porters, seamen, boatmen, pilots, navigators, traffic controllers, bus conductors, dockers. Telephonists, telegraph operators, postmen, messengers.

Clerical and office staff

Typists, secretaries, clerks, cashiers, office machine operators, computer operators.
Central and local government, all executive and clerical grades

Shopkeepers, sales, services, sport and recreation workers, fire brigade and police

Shop proprietors and managers, assistants, salesmen, travellers, insurance brokers, auctioneers, valuers, undertakers.
Hotel and restaurant owners and workers, publicans, barmen, waiters, cooks, maids, cleaners.
Chimney sweeps, caretakers.
Hairdressers, laundries, garages, roundsmen.
Hospital orderlies, ambulance men.
Athletes, models, photographers

Retired, independent means, not working (other than housewives) students.

In institutions, e.g. prison, chronic sick etc.

Level of highest educational qualification attained

No formal educational qualifications	Low
CSE (other than grade 1), RSA or school leaving certificate	
CSE grade 1, GCE O level, SCE O grade, school certificate or equivalent, BEC general certificate and diploma	
GCE A level, SCE H grade, higher school certificate or equivalent	Medium
ONC/OND, BEC national certificates or diplomas, TEC certificates and diplomas	
HNC/HND, BEC higher national certificates and diplomas, TEC higher certificates and higher diplomas	
Teachers certificates or equivalent	High
University diploma or equivalent based on at least one year's full time study (includes diplomas in higher education)	
First degree of CNAA or university	
Postgraduate degree	

OLDER STUDENTS BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

CARD 0 1 (1-3)

Please put a ring around your answer like this (3) *or, where appropriate, write your answer in the space provided. But first, PLEASE WRITE YOUR STUDENT NUMBER HERE* [| | | . | | | | |] (4-11)

SECTION 1: In this section we would like to ask how and why you chose to study with the OU.

1. How did you first come to hear of the OU? *(ring all that apply)*

Advertisements in general press	1	(12)
Friends	1	(13)
Relatives *(please say who)* _____	1	(14)
_____		
TV/Radio programmes	1	(15)
Colleagues at work	1	(16)
Posters	1	(17)
Newspaper/magazine articles	1	(18)
Other *(write in)* _____	1	(19)
_____		

(20) [ ] *For office use*

2. At the time you decided to apply, did you know anyone who had studied or was studying with the OU? *(ring all that apply)*

Yes, family	1	(21)
Yes, friends	1	(22)
Yes, colleagues at work	1	(23)
Yes, acquaintances	1	(24)
Nobody	1	(25)

3. (a) What were your reasons for wanting to study? and
(b) Which was your main reason?

	Your reasons *(ring all that apply)*		Main reason *(ring one)*	
To continue developing as a person - stretching myself	1	(26)	1	(39)
Just wanted to keep my mind active	1	(27)	2	
To get a degree	1	(28)	3	
To develop my interest in a particular area	1	(29)	4	
To prove something to myself	1	(30)	5	
Wanted to be better educated, better informed generally	1	(31)	6	
To find a new identity after retirement	1	(32)	7	
To make up for lack of opportunity or missed opportunities in the past	1	(33)	8	
To fill in extra leisure time	1	(34)	9	
To make new friends/meet congenial people	1	(35)	A	
Study would be a new interest	1	(36)	B	
To have more in common with family/friends who have studied more than me	1	(37)	C	
Other *(write in)* _____ _____	1	(38)	D	

4. (a) Why did you choose to register with the OU rather than some other institution?

(b) Which was your main reason?

	Your reasons *(ring all that apply)*		Main reason *(ring one)*	
Didn't consider any other institution	1	*(40)*	1	*(49)*
No attractive alternatives available locally	1	*(41)*	2	
OU had a better reputation/recommended	1	*(42)*	3	
OU had the range of subjects required	1	*(43)*	4	
Prefer home-based studies	1	*(44)*	5	
Use of TV/Radio as teaching media	1	*(45)*	6	
Couldn't get on the course I wanted elsewhere	1	*(46)*	7	
Liked the concept of the OU	1	*(47)*	8	
Other *(write in)* _____	1	*(48)*	9	

5. Before you actually started studying, you must have anticipated some pleasurable aspects of your proposed venture.

(a) Can you say what these were at the time? and
(b) whether or not these turned out to be real?
(ring all that apply for both)

	Expected		Happened	
Companionship	1	*(50)*	1	*(60)*
Stimulation: new ideas to think/talk about	1	*(51)*	1	*(61)*
A sense of achievement	1	*(52)*	1	*(62)*
Increased confidence/self-esteem	1	*(53)*	1	*(63)*
Pleasure of learning/studying	1	*(54)*	1	*(64)*
Something positive to replace my career	1	*(55)*	1	*(65)*
Mixing with younger people	1	*(56)*	1	*(66)*
More respect from family/friends	1	*(57)*	1	*(67)*
Better communication with people	1	*(58)*	1	*(68)*
Other *(write in)* _____	1	*(59)*	1	*(69)*

6. Similarly, you were probably worried by some aspects.

(a) Can you say what these were at the time? and
(b) whether or not these turned out to be real?
(ring all that apply for both)

CARD 2 *(3)*

	Expected		Happened	
I thought I might have difficulty understanding the units	1	*(70)*	1	*(12)*
I wondered whether my health would be a problem	1	*(71)*	1	*(13)*
I thought I might lose contact with friends	1	*(72)*	1	*(14)*
I was worried by the thought of exams, assessment etc.	1	*(73)*	1	*(15)*
I thought I might have problems finding the money for fees	1	*(74)*	1	*(16)*
I thought I might not fit in	1	*(75)*	1	*(17)*
I was worried about my memory	1	*(76)*	1	*(18)*
I didn't know if I would cope with the pace/ organisation of study	1	*(77)*	1	*(19)*
I was worried about the written	1	*(78)*	1	*(20)*
Other *(write in)* _____	1	*(79)*	1	*(21)*

7. (a) Did you discuss your study plans/registration with an advisory counsellor or anyone else in the Regional Office?

and (b) if so, was it helpful? *(ring all that apply)*

	Discussed with		Helpful	
Yes, counsellor	1	(22)	1	(26)
Yes, tutor/counsellor ...	1	(23)	1	(27)
Yes, other regional staff	1	(24)	1	(28)
No, nobody	1	(25)	1	(29)

8. Did you undertake any formal study as preparation specifically for studying with the OU? *(ring all that apply)*

National Extension College preparatory course	1	(30)
Other preparatory course	1	(31)
'O' or 'A' levels	1	(32)
OU preparatory materials	1	(33)
No, nothing formal	1	(34)
Other *(write in)* _____	1	(35)

9. Did you do any private reading as preparation specifically for studying with the OU?

Yes	1	(36)
No	2	

SECTION 2: This section concentrates on your personal experiences both before and after joining the OU.

10. Looking back, did you enjoy your own schooling? *(ring one)*

Very much	1	(37)
On the whole	2	
Not very much	3	
Not at all	4	

11. Did you take up any training or further education after leaving school?
(a) Immediately or soon after leaving school
(b) Some time later (5 years or more)
(ring all that apply for both)

	Immediately/ soon after		Later (5 years +)	
Yes, leading to professional qualification	1	(38)	1	(45)
Yes, Apprenticeship	1	(39)	1	(46)
Yes, leading to educational qualifications	1	(40)	1	(47)
Yes, courses mainly for interest but not leading to qualifications	1	(41)	1	(48)
Yes, other work-related/vocational training	1	(42)	1	(49)
No, nothing formal	1	(43)	1	(50)
Other *(write in)* _____	1	(44)	1	(51)

12. Was your schooling or later education interrupted by any of the following? *(ring all that apply)*

Moving home	1	(52)
War/national service	1	(53)
Lack of money	1	(54)
Illness (self)	1	(55)
Illness (family)	1	(56)
Marriage	1	(57)
Having a family	1	(58)
Other *(write in)* _____	1	(59)

13. In general terms, have you enjoyed your working life? (This includes housework for those who have always been housewives.)

Very much	1	(60)
On the whole	2	
Not very much	3	
Not at all	4	

14. Have you, in fact, retired yet?

Yes	1	(61)
No	2	

If No, when do you expect to retire?

Within 6 months	1	(62)
6 months- 1 year	2	
2 - 3 years	3	
More than 3 years	4	

15. In the space below, would you please write in the job title/or description of your main occupations or that which best describes the kind of work you've been involved in during your working life.

_____

_____

CARD 3 (3)

16.a) At the time when you began studying with the OU, what were your main activities or interests? and
b) have you restricted or curtailed any of them since because of your OU study? *(ring all that apply)*

	Current at the time began		Restricted/ curtailed since	
Voluntary social work	1	(12)	1	(23)
Sporting activities	1	(13)	1	(24)
Political activities	1	(14)	1	(25)
Women's organisations	1	(15)	1	(26)
Art/music/literary societies	1	(16)	1	(27)
Watching TV/listening to radio, music	1	(17)	1	(28)
Religious, church activities	1	(18)	1	(29)
Home-based hobbies	1	(19)	1	(30)
Gardening/DIY	1	(20)	1	(31)
Visiting friends/relatives	1	(21)	1	(32)
Other *(write in)* _____	1	(22)	1	(33)

_____

17. How do you feel about your contact with OU staff and other students?

	Happy	but with some reservations	Unhappy	No contact	
Tutor	1	2	3	4	(34)
Counsellor	1	2	3	4	(35)
Tutor-counsellor	1	2	3	4	(36)
Summer-school staff	1	2	3	4	(37)
Regional staff	1	2	3	4	(38)
Walton Hall staff	1	2	3	4	(39)
Fellow students	1	2	3	4	(40)
Regional office staff	1	2	3	4	(41)

18. Do you make use of the facilities provided by your region?

	Regularly	Sometimes	Not at all	Not available	
Face to face tutorials	1	2	3	4	(42)
Telephone tutorials	1	2	3	4	(43)
Self-help groups	1	2	3	4	(44)
Day schools	1	2	3	4	(45)
Computer terminals	1	2	3	4	(46)
TV/video/other media resources (e.g. course units)	1	2	3	4	(47)
Special outings	1	2	3	4	(48)
General study centre meetings (e.g. con. reg.)	1	2	3	4	(49)

19. Have you wanted to use these facilities more than you have been able to?

Yes 1 (50)
No 2

IF YES, what were your problems? *(ring all that apply)*

Transport difficulties 1 (51)
Disability 1 (52)
Ill-health 1 (53)
Time unsuitable 1 (54)
Place unsuitable 1 (55)
Travel too expensive 1 (56)
Other *(write in)* _____ 1 (57)

_____

20. How have you felt about working alongside younger students and staff?

	Students		Staff	
Stimulated	1	(58)	1	(59)
Pleased	2		2	
Neutral	3		3	
Uneasy	4		4	
Unhappy	5		5	

21. Have your studies created any domestic difficulties?

Yes, many difficulties	1	(60)
Yes, a few difficulties	2	
No real difficulties	3	

IF YES, and you would like to tell us what sort of difficulties these were, please use this space.

_____

_____

_____

For office use

(61,62)

22. Has anything interrupted your OU studies? *(ring all that apply)*

Moving home	1	(63)
Illness (self)	1	(64)
Illness (family)	1	(65)
Bereavement	1	(66)
Other domestic problems	1	(67)
Financial matters	1	(68)
Demands of my job	1	(69)
Other *(write in)* _____	1	(70)

23. What was/is the aim of your studies?

6-credit BA degree	1	(71)
Honours degree	2	
Studying for pleasure	3	

24. Finally, do you intend to carry on studying in the future?

Yes, other OU studies - associate, short course or pack	1	(72)
Yes, a second degree with the OU	2	
Yes, with another institution	3	
Yes, but informally (reading etc.)	4	
Don't know	5	
Definitely not	6	

IF DEFINITELY NOT, what will you do instead of studying?

Pursue new interests	1	(73)
Pick up old interests	2	
Nothing in particular/have a rest	3	

Thank you for answering these questions. If we have missed something which you think is important to older students, please tell us about it in the space we have left below.

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Appendix 3: Response bias

To check the bias, we compared the demographic characteristics of the respondents with all those who were sent the questionnaire. The bias that does exist is very similar to that to be expected for Open University students, both for the over 60s and the under 60s.

The main features are:

i) Housewives, teachers, professions and arts, and communications and transport categories all respond at higher rates than average;

ii) students who had been in the system either a long time or only a short time responded less well than those who entered between 1975 and 1979;

iii) women responded better than men, but the difference was only really marked in the under 60s group;

iv) for the over 60s those with low educational qualification, those with ONC/OND or university diploma responded best:

v) those with credit exemptions on the basis of previous qualifications respond better than those without;

vi) the more credits gained, the better the response.

None of the features were thought large enough to warrant any compensatory weighting in the analyses we have used in this report.

Appendix 4: Interview schedule

Opening questions	Things to look for/ possible follow up areas
1.	
(i) What were your reasons for studying?	(i) -catch up on missed opportunities- keep intellectually active - fill in time after retirement-maintain/look more deeply into an existing interest-find a new interest - need to become involved-challenge.
	Q.3 - missed opportunities - mind active-develop as a person - get degree
(ii) What were you doing at the time? (what was your occupation)/ what were you doing beforehand?	
(iii) Why did you choose the courses you took?	(iii) -familiarity with subject area- new territory -only courses available.
2. Why did you choose the OU rather than a conventional university or college?	-openness of OU/lack of formal background- only able to study at home - more comfortable studying by self than with others- modular system allows more control over pacing - attractiveness of continuous assessment system-general interest in OU methods of study - was time a major consideration
	Q.4 - liked concept of OU - prefer home based studies - didn't consider other institutions
3. What do you hope to gain from your studies?	- interest in certification-intrinsic satisfaction of studying - prove something to self- increased general kn owledge and understanding - plans for after OU-higher degree - new career
	Q.23 Aim - ½ for ord degree or ord plus pleasure. 1/3 for hons or hons plus pleasure, 1/5 only for pleasure.
	Q.24 Future- associate/pack - don't know - informal reading.
4. (i) Is the OU much as you imagined it would be or is it very different from your original expectations?	- in terms of interest- quality of units and course materials -TV-academic level -workload -assignments- cpntact with other students -amount and value of contact with tutors and counsellors.
(ii) Did you have any worries beforehand - what happened in practice?	*Q.5 Pleasures- pleasure of learning/studying-stimulation - sense of achievement*
	Q.6 Worries-memory-cope with pace/organisation of study- exams/assessment-understanding units.

5.

(i) What advice would you give to someone like yourself if they were thinking about joining the OU now. What kinds of things ought they to consider before applying.

-see course materials-seek admissions advice - resuming studies after long absence-preparatory work/courses to get back into the swing of things-impact on family or social life and other activities-finding time for study.

(ii) Did you do any preparatory work before starting?

how much-what kind-was it useful

Q.7 Discuss study - no contact-tutor/counselling - counsellor

Q.8 Formal Prep-none-OU prep materials-none -other prep courses

6. (a) Do you make much use of the tutorial provision or have much contact with other students.

a) -access to tutorials - cost/distance/time involved in travelling -get along with other students -receive adequate support -more likely to use telephone tutorials-demand for tapes and transcripts-value of tutors and counsellors -self help groups.

Q.17 Value-fellow students-TC, SS staff-tutor

Q.19 Problems- time unsuitable -transport -unsuitable

Q.20 Younger students- stimulated - pleased

(b) Have you been to any summer schools-were they helpful?

b) -attitudes towards summer schools in prospect/retrospect -contact with others -enjoyment

Q.17 Value of SS Staff -60% happy, 23% happy with reservations

7. (i) How do you organize your time for study. Do you for example routinely set aside a certain amount of time each day for study or work in concentrated bursts.

- how many hours per week -more time available-slowed down by fatigue, loss of concentration -separate area for study-free from other pressures-more time now retired.

(ii) How does the OU fit into your life?

8. (i) Have you experienced any problems or difficulties whilst studying with the OU?

-problems with materials-organization work-learning new skills-rusty study skills impact on domestic/social life-illness and other physical difficulties-finance-enhancement

Q.22 Interruptions- illness(self)-job demands illness(family)-bereavement/domestic problems

Q.6 Worries happened-assessment/exams - memory pace organisation of study-fees

8. (ii) Do you find exams a problem?

(iii) Has retirement affected your studies?

(iv) Are there problems you face as an older student?

9. Are there any aspects of the OU you particularly like?

10. Are there any aspects of the OU you particularly dislike?

11. Do you have any suggestions for ways of improving the OU system?

-Age related items- size of print/clarity of diagrams - do tutors and course teams take enough account of older students - more allowance made for submission of TMAs.

Appendix 5: Full details of students' reasons for study- older and younger students

	Over 60s		Under 60s	
	Main reason	Any reason	Main reason	Any reason
Base = respondents	861	861	884	884
	%	%	%	%
To make up for lack of opportunities or missed opportunities in the past	12	65	11	55
Wanted to keep my mind active	14	60	8	41
To get a degree	13	56	20	73
To continue developing as a person- stretching myself	15	56	16	65
Wanted to get better educated, better informed generally	8	46	8	50
To prove something to myself	5	36	10	43
To further my career (only asked of younger students)	-	-	10	42
To develop interest in a particular area	9	34	7	31
To find a new identity after retirement (only asked of older students)	4	29	-	-
To fill in extra leisure time	2	22	1	10
Study would be a new interest	0	19	0	10
To have more in common with friends/family who have studied more than me	1	12	0	6
To make new friends/meet congenial people	0	11	0	6
Other	9	9	2	2
Pleasure	1	1	1	1
Need to communicate	1	1	0	0

Appendix 6: Younger students' expectations of O.U. study

	Expected	Happened
Base = respondents	884	884
	%	%
A sense of achievement	77	68
Stimulation: new ideas to think/talk about	75	73
Pleasure of learning/studying	62	56
*Better career prospects	38	15
Increased confidence/self-esteem	38	35
Better communication with people	23	22
Companionship	10	13
*More respect from work colleagues	10	12
More respect from family/friends	8	13

* These options on the younger student questionnaire replaced options relating to retirement on the older students questionnaire.

Appendix 7 : Pleasurable expectations and educational background for over 60s

	Expected			Happened		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Base = respondents	425	152	241	425	152	241
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pleasure of learning/studying	78	81	83	71	71	73
Stimulation:new ideas to think/talk about	76	74	76	70	71	70
A sense of achievement	70	59	63	59	45	54
Something positive to replace my career	31	34	34	28	29	30
Increased confidence/self-esteem	25	24	20	24	20	17
Better communication	28	18	9	21	14	10
Companionship	12	7	12	13	9	10
Mixing with younger people	10	14	10	15	15	15
More respect from family/friends	5	10	6	8	8	10

Appendix 8: Full details of student use of support service

	Regularly		Sometimes		Not at all		Not Available	
	Over 60s	Under 60s	Over 60s	Under 60s	Over 60s	Under 60s	Over 60s	Under 60s
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Face to face tutorials	67	52	19	28	7	12	2	5
Telephone tutorials	-	3	11	14	38	44	20	26
Self-help groups	11	11	20	20	32	43	18	17
Day schools	36	22	19	20	19	28	12	20
Computer terminals	4	6	9	18	40	45	11	18
TV/video/other media resources (e.g. course units)	65	49	10	16	9	23	2	3
Special outings	12	5	17	13	27	44	20	26
General study centre meetings (e.g. con.reg)	28	20	26	35	24	30	5	6

Appendix 9: Tutorial and counselling support -contact with OU staff and other students

	Happy		Happy- but with some reservations		Unhappy		No contact	
	Over 60s	Under 60s	Over 60s	Under 60s	Over 60s	Under 60s	Over 60s	Under 60s
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Tutor	50	46	26	23	3	4	5	10
Counsellor	35	30	5	8	1	3	23	30
Tutor-counsellor	60	50	10	14	2	4	11	16
Summer school staff	60	52	23	29	2	4	7	8
Regional staff	29	19	4	5	1	2	44	60
Walton Hall staff	22	16	3	4	1	1	53	65
Fellow students	65	55	12	22	1	3	11	13
Regional Office staff	29	18	3	4	1	1	48	63